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**The Classical Teaching on Tyranny**

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**by**

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## **Dedication**

To Charles Kaffie—a gentleman.

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I would like to thank Professor Lorraine Pangle for working so closely with me on this project and all of my teachers at The University of Texas for their support.

## **Abstract**

### **The Classical Teaching on Tyranny**

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Understanding tyranny is essential to political life. Yet, recent attempts to analyze the phenomenon have overlooked the importance of understanding the tyrant as an individual—they neglect to study the psychology of tyranny. The political science of the ancients, on the other hand, makes the soul of the tyrant the core of its treatment of tyranny. By turning to two key works, Plato’s *Republic* and Xenophon’s *Hiero*, one sees that from the ancient perspective tyranny is critiqued for its failure to satisfy the deepest desires of those who pursue it. Tyranny is bad for the ruler as well as the ruled. Plato’s *Republic* reveals the standard by which tyranny is judged by the ancients but does not provide a complete analysis of political tyranny as lived by the tyrant. The *Hiero* fills in this picture, allowing us to see that the tyrannical man is motivated above all by a Sisyphean desire for love. Thus, if liberal democracy wishes to defend itself against the threat of tyranny, we must learn from the ancients how to redirect this desire in a way conducive to the common good.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The victory of liberalism, in thought and practice, which until recently seemed so certain is now in doubt: theocratic rule in the Middle East, Marxist communism in China, and the rise of authoritarian cults of personality in Russia and elsewhere, their shadows here at home—the threat seems omnipresent.<sup>1</sup> Liberalism must meet these challenges. For liberalism to meet these challenges it is necessary that we first understand them. But to understand them we must understand tyranny, a term as old as politics itself. Political science thus finds itself tasked with acquiring such an understanding.

Within political science there are two approaches—democratic political theory and institutionalist political science—that confront tyranny directly. Each approach has its strengths, but both struggle to speak to a core aspect of tyranny: the psychological makeup of the tyrant. The discipline of political science devalues individuals and their role in shaping regimes in favor of institutionalist approaches that seek to explain politics through structural causes. The institutionalist approach shows us how tyranny leads to inefficient and unstable political structures; it does not explain the condition of tyranny for the tyrant and why such a man seeks to rule. But the tyrant is an individual, one who by his nature subverts institutions and the rule of law. The structures that an institutionalist approach relies on are torn down and replaced by the desires of an all-powerful sovereign. Thus, to fully understand tyranny as a political phenomenon requires an understanding of the tyrant himself. Democratic theory faces a similar challenge. Attacking from a normative perspective, democratic theory argues that tyranny cannot be justified because tyrannical rule is fundamentally illegitimate. Like the institutionalist approach, democratic theory critiques tyranny on the grounds that it is contrary to the interests of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the tyrannical character of these regimes and a consideration of whether Trumpism is itself tyrannical see the new introduction to Newell, *Tyrants*, 1-30.



ruled.<sup>2</sup> Yet once again we must ask, if the tyrannical regime is both illegitimate and inefficient, why do men still seek to rule as tyrants? We tend to assume that the answer to this question is simple, the tyrannical man is morally corrupt. He recognizes that tyrannical rule is hostile to the common good yet pursues it nonetheless out of a greedy desire to benefit himself.<sup>3</sup> However, while both democratic theory and institutionalist political science rely on this presumption, a well-intentioned desire to maintain scientific rigor prevents them from formally acknowledging it.<sup>4</sup> Yet, to truly understand the political phenomenon of tyranny requires that we understand the tyrannical man and why such a man pursues power. It requires a psychological treatment of the tyrant.

However, insofar as political science has adopted a psychological methodology it tends to focus on large-scale evaluations of political behavior. Rather than looking at the psychological drives of individual actors we look at the behaviors of peoples or groups, leaving us unprepared to analyze the tyrant as an individual. But without an understanding of the tyrant as an individual we cannot provide a complete explanatory account of the phenomenon of tyranny, and we thus fall short of a complete political science.<sup>5</sup> Further, by failing to fathom the tyrant's motives in coming to power we cannot supply political life with the necessary tools to defend against him. Without understanding what the potential tyrant desires in pursuing political rule we cannot say how those desires might be refocused in a way that is conducive to the common good.<sup>6</sup> Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> Consider Ian Shapiro, "Tyranny and Democracy: Reflections on Some Recent Literature," in *The Real World of Democratic Theory*, (Princeton University Press, 2011) 68-79.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> As an example, see the treatment of tyranny as a pathology in Macfarlane, "Absolutism, Tyranny, and the Minimum Conditions of Constitutional Rule," 212-33.

<sup>5</sup> For a robust critique of contemporary social psychology as a whole and the shortcomings of its theoretical basis see Forbes, *Nationalism, Ethnocentrism & Personality*. Forbes argues persuasively that the modern social psychological approach is flawed in its reliance upon an overly reductionistic account of human desires which stems from a misstep in the thought of Freud.

<sup>6</sup> The suggestions offered at the end of Newell, *Tyrants*, 224-244 on how democracy can win against tyranny while helpful in many respects could be benefitted by such an understanding.

despite a pressing theoretical and political need to understand tyranny, the science devoted to the study of politics finds itself insufficient for meeting those needs. A renewed attempt to understand tyranny is demanded of us both as scientists and as citizens.

For these reasons, a turn to the political science of another epoch is necessary to understand the nature of political tyranny. There is no political science more suited to this than that of the ancients.<sup>7</sup> The ancients, understanding the deeply personal nature of tyrannical rule, present their most serious reflections on tyranny through considerations of the tyrant's soul. Unlike those of us brought up in a liberal regime, the ancients were able to consider tyranny in a morally unbiased manner. They examine honestly the greater honors, pleasures, and possessions acquired by the tyrant and ask in a genuinely open spirit if such goods make tyrannical life choiceworthy. While these examinations do include strong criticisms of tyranny, they also explore with surprising openness the possibility that tyrannical rule is a particularly successful and satisfying form of political life, or perhaps even of life altogether. Thus, ancient political science appears to be a useful supplement to our modern understanding of tyranny: it looks directly at why the tyrant desires to rule and questions if tyrannical life fulfills those desires. Yet, the ancients did not present their thoughts on tyranny in a simple statement but instead presented pieces of their teaching as it applied to various situations. As a result, rather than simply referring to a single treatise on tyranny, a consideration of the ancient view requires a synthesis of multiple dialectical settings across multiple writings. There are two presentations that I believe are especially useful for this purpose: Xenophon's *Hiero* and the eighth and ninth books of Plato's *Republic*. Each of these dialogues presents a part of the classical teaching on tyranny while at the same time acknowledging, yet abstracting from, an important subject—each one treats in some depth what the other leaves undiscussed. Thus, it is my hope that a synoptic

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<sup>7</sup> Forbes, *Nationalism, Ethnocentrism & Personality*, 182-185.

treatment of these two pieces of the classical understanding will reveal a more holistic teaching on tyranny than could be gleaned from either part alone.

Before we can begin unpacking the ancients' treatment of tyranny it is first necessary to acknowledge the odd form in which they have chosen to present it and this form's implications for our study. Both Plato and Xenophon treat tyranny in the form of a dialogue, not a political or philosophic treatise. The dialogic form presents two major complications. First, because of the dramatic nature of a dialogue, the author himself never explicitly speaks.<sup>8</sup> These dialogues contain three primary interlocutors—the tyrant Hiero, the great poet Simonides, and Plato's Socrates—whose speeches make up the vast majority of the works. While Simonides and Socrates both play the role of the wise man or teacher within their respective dialogue, we must not be too eager and assume that they speak for the author. Simonides and Socrates are characters in dramas that the ancients have written for us, and just as we cannot assume the views of Nora Helmer to be identical with those of Ibsen nor for Macbeth to speak simply for Shakespeare, neither can we assume Simonides or Socrates to be the mouthpiece of Xenophon or Plato. Thus, to understand the ancient teaching on tyranny we must learn not only from the speeches of these two characters but by following the dramatic movement of the dialogue as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

All of this taken together raises the second great challenge of the dialogic form, the need to carefully consider the dialectical setting in which the conversation takes place. As characters within a drama, both Simonides and Socrates may have reasons for not simply speaking their mind as a result of the dialectical setting. Again, just as we cannot take Macbeth at his word neither can we do the same for the characters of Xenophon or Plato. Thus, to understand the

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<sup>8</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), 50-62.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

teaching of the ancients we must consider the speeches presented in the dialogues in light of the dramatic settings in which those speeches take place. By doing this, we hope to see more clearly the positions of each interlocutor and through an analysis of these positions to come to understand the teachings of the authors themselves.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## II. PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*: THE DUAL ACCOUNT OF TYRANNY

Yet, as we turn now to consider these challenges as they apply to the more notorious treatment of tyranny, Plato's *Republic*, we are immediately met with significant differences between the two works. Unlike with Simonides, we know Socrates to have been not only the great teacher of Plato but also a man considered by Plato to have been a philosopher. Thus, it is safer to look to Socrates, more-so than will be the case with Simonides, as a source of authority or truth within the dialogue. However, the dialogic form of the *Republic* means that Socrates' remarks necessarily take place within a particular dialectical setting, a setting which may compel Socrates to speak in certain ways depending upon its character. To fully understand the character of this setting would require a complete treatment of the drama of the *Republic*, but for present purposes some general remarks must suffice.<sup>11</sup> The conversation in the *Republic* takes place in the house of Cephalus between a group of men of varying degrees of friendliness toward Socrates. Thus, while the conversation in which we find Socrates is a private one it is at the same time one in which he may not be speaking completely freely. The two interlocutors in Books Eight and Nine are Adeimantus, who has shown himself throughout the dialogue to be something of an austere conservative gentleman, and his brother Glaucon who is an erotic man both intellectually and physically. These interlocutors share two things in common: both have shown themselves to have anti-democratic tendencies and both are also the elder brothers of the promising young Plato.<sup>12</sup> These details bear upon Socrates' remarks in the dialogue in two ways. First, Socrates may be looking to dissuade any tyrannical ambitions of the two brothers or the many silent onlookers through his treatment of the tyrannical soul. But additionally, and perhaps more importantly, he may also wish to present philosophic life in such a way that it appears

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<sup>11</sup> See both Nails, *People of Plato*, 356-379 and Nails, *The Dramatic Date of Plato's Republic*, for extensive treatments of the characters and setting surrounding the dialogue.

<sup>12</sup> Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 305-436.

especially noble to the brothers of Plato. Should he succeed in doing so, the two would likely be more supportive of their younger brother spending time as a student of Socrates. These suggestions, however, should not be assumed to be fact, but rather taken as factors to bear in mind as we turn to Socrates' puzzling comparison of the philosophic soul with that of the tyrant.

## ***Republic* Book Eight: The Emergence of the Tyrannical Regime**

The psychological treatment of the tyrant in the *Republic* follows closely upon Plato's account of the five forms of regimes from Book Eight. Alongside the first four regimes—the kingly, the timocratic, the oligarchic, and the democratic—Socrates includes an account of the type of human soul that corresponds to each kind of rule. Yet, while Socrates includes a political treatment of the tyrannical regime and the tyrannical man alongside the others in Book Eight, the tyrannical soul is discussed once more on different grounds in Book Nine. Thus, the treatment of the tyrannical man is the only examination of the soul that is extensive enough to warrant its own book in the traditional division of the dialogue. Further, in this second treatment of tyranny, Plato chooses to discuss the tyrannical soul alongside that of the philosopher, a comparison which is unique to the tyrannical soul. Thus, the very structure of the *Republic* suggests that Plato too held the tyrannical soul to be of particular interest and thought a comparison of the tyrant and the philosopher to be especially worth highlighting.

However, while the Platonic treatment of tyranny in the *Republic* is commonly associated with Book Nine, Socrates' account of the tyrannical regime in Book Eight is often overlooked. In discussing how each regime changes into a new form, Socrates considers in detail how a man from a democratic regime becomes a tyrant. In doing so, Socrates not only describes the change in the character of the regime itself but the change within the soul of the tyrannical man. In other words, while the psychological account of the tyrant begins most obviously in Book Nine, it is in fact treated in some detail in Book Eight. Further, the account of the tyrannical man in Book Eight differs in important respects from what we will find in the later book.<sup>13</sup> The tyrannical

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<sup>13</sup> The primary difference between my position and that of Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City*, can be found in this point. While Arruzza rightly identifies the beginning of the *Republic's* treatment of the tyrant as being in Book Eight, his

regime, Socrates claims, emerges out of the democratic regime as a result of the insatiable democratic desire for freedom (562c). As this desire for freedom grows, the citizens become more and more demanding of their rulers. They are outraged by any sort of impediment to their freedom, however justified it might be, and charge their rulers with being corrupt oligarchs if they try to impose any restrictions upon them (562d, 563d). At its most extreme, this hunger for freedom and hatred of any restrictions become a hostility toward the rule of law itself (563d-e). Additionally, such a democracy contains three major classes: the ruling class, the money-making class, and the people. It will be common practice in the democratic regime, Socrates claims, for the ruling class to redistribute the wealth of the moneymakers amongst the people in such a way that they receive the greatest share (564b-565a). The moneymakers are driven by this continuous exploitation to eventually becoming oligarchs themselves, seeking to use their wealth in opposition to the people (565b).

It is from this condition of internal tension and an excessive thirst for freedom, Socrates claims, that democracy begins to transform into tyranny. The people will designate one man as their leader and make him grow great. It is from this root of leadership, Socrates tells Adeimantus, that a tyrant naturally grows (565c-d). This change from leader to tyrant takes place when this man tastes a single morsel of human flesh and undergoes a change similar to that of the ancient hero Lycaon into a bloodthirsty wolf. In the democratic regime, this transformation is a result of conflict between the leader of the people and the oligarchic class. In an attempt to appease his supporters, the leader of the people unjustly brings charges against another man and murders him before the court. Having already done such violence, Socrates asserts, the leader of the people will continue to banish, kill, and hint at the cancellation of debts and redistribution of

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conclusion that the accounts in Books Eight and Nine are consistent with one another does not seem to be born out by the text.



land (565e-566a). In other words, a democratic leader's transformation into a tyrant begins when his desire to please the people leads him to enact violence against the oligarchic faction within the city. Once he has shed the blood of one of his fellow citizens, the democratic leader is set on a path of continual violence against his own people that eventually leads to his ruling as tyrant.

The treatment of tyranny in Book Eight, while alarming to our democratic ears, is on the whole a rather sober one. While one might reasonably contend that Plato ignores the possibility of tyranny emerging out of oligarchic regimes, the argument reminds us of the very real dangers of the democratic love of freedom, especially when such love becomes hostile to the rule of law. One need look no further than the writing of Thucydides to see examples of the democratic tendency to give power to a single man and the dangers that such abdication poses in the figure of Alcibiades.<sup>14</sup> When a man who comes to power in this way is both demagogic and ruthless the soil is ripe for tyranny to emerge. The tyrannical man is a natural ruler: he desires to lead rather than be led and to dominate rather than be dominated. He is incredibly politically ambitious, but ultimately seeks power primarily for its own sake. The tyrannical man wants to be the one in charge. Yet, what is perhaps most interesting about Socrates' treatment of tyranny in Book Eight is his emphasis on the bloodthirsty character of the man who is to become a tyrant. Socrates compares the tyrant to a man who, upon tasting the blood of his own kind, is transformed into a ferocious beast. This violent and bloodthirsty characteristic, while greatly emphasized by later Islamic interpreters of Plato such as Alfarabi and Averroes, is strikingly absent from Socrates' psychological account of the tyrant in Book Nine. While the extent of the tyrant's bloodlust may be somewhat overstated for the sake of Socrates' audience, that there is a capacity for violence toward one's fellow citizens for the sake of power in his characterization of the tyrant cannot be

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<sup>14</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 2009).

denied.<sup>15</sup> It is from this initial act of violence that a chain of events begins to unfold that transforms the champion of the people into one who rules over them as a master.

Socrates describes this process in the few remaining pages of Book Eight. In response to the leader's hostility the wealthy within the city may exile him in an attempt to weaken his influence. If the champion of the people is able to return to the city in spite of his enemies, Socrates claims, he comes back a complete tyrant. If the wealthy are unable to exile him or to kill him by slandering him to the city, they will resort to more underhanded methods, plotting the tyrant's assassination (566a). In response to this, the leader of the people must make a characteristically tyrannical request and ask for bodyguards to protect him from the oligarchs. Once this request has been granted, the tyrant's violence toward those with wealth grows rampant on the grounds that they are the enemies of the people (566b-c). Having killed or cast out all who would oppose him in this way, the champion of the people now stands in the chariot of the city as a tyrant (566d). It is at this point, with the transformation of the democratic regime into the tyrannical regime having been illustrated by Socrates, that the conversation turns to consider the happiness of the tyrant and the city over which he rules (566d). Again, we see that while Socrates' formal turn to the tyrannical man takes place in Book Nine, a prior treatment has already taken place in Book Eight on a different basis. In the early days of his rule, Socrates asserts, the tyrannical man will appear both gracious and gentle, denying that he is a tyrant and granting freedom from debt and redistribution of land to the people who support him. However, once he has dealt with his enemies from abroad, the tyrant's first step will always be to set some war in motion so that the people continue to be in need of a leader (566e). This perpetual war also impoverishes the people through their contributions to the war effort, making them more

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<sup>15</sup> On the literary significance of the wolf metaphor in antiquity see Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City*, 184-185.

focused on their own financial affairs and less likely to plot against the tyrant. Additionally, war gives the tyrant a useful pretense for doing away with those in the city—even those close to him who helped bring him to power—who he suspects of opposing his rule, sending them to their deaths in battle with the enemy (567a-b).

In particular, the tyrant must do away with those close to him who are manliest or most courageous until he has no friend around him of any worth whatsoever. The tyrant must be on the lookout for those who are courageous, great-minded, prudent, or rich and plot against them until he has purged them from the city (567c). As a result, the tyrant is left with only those in the city who are most worthless around him. It must be these men, Socrates sarcastically remarks, who the poets must refer to when they say that tyrants become wise through intercourse with the wise. By carrying out such violent actions against his own citizens the tyrant becomes progressively more hated by them. Thus, he has need for more—and more trustworthy—armed guards. To do this, the tyrant will use the wealth that he has taken from the oligarchs to pay the wages of more guards, but the most trustworthy of those who protect him will be the slaves of the citizens who he sets free in order to garner their favor (567d-e). The tyrant will spend the sacred money within the temples of the city until it has run dry and will then turn to those who have begotten him, the people of the city, for further support. The people, growing tired of supporting the one they had chosen to support them against the oligarchs and of living as slaves to their own slaves, turn against the tyrant and oppose his rule. Thus, the tyrant must use force even against those who begot him, Socrates claims, making him in a way a sort of parricide (568c-569c).

Socrates' account of the transformation of the people's leader into a tyrant portrays a man who is led by his desire for power to progressively more violence toward his fellow citizens. While the tyrant is perhaps not as bloodthirsty as Socrates' initial image of the wolf or later Islamic interpreters would suggest, it cannot be denied that one of the defining characteristics of the tyrannical man in Book Eight is a willingness to do harm to others for the sake of acquiring and maintaining his rule. It is thus quite curious that this violent character, while emphasized in this earlier account, seems to vanish in Socrates' psychological evaluation of the tyrannical man that is to follow. Once an initial act of aggression is taken against the oligarchs, the tyrannical man is forced to use more and more resources to protect himself. However, even once both the oligarchs and the city's foreign enemies have been defeated, the tyrant continues to exercise force against the very people who brought him to power. Thus, we see a very sensible picture of the tyrannical man in Book Eight as one who is willing to use any means, even violence toward his own people, to achieve and maintain power. He may even develop a taste for such violence, but he does not originally seize power for the sake of doing violence; he somehow falls into being worse than he intended. After all, the tyrant does not begin as the enemy of the people but rather as their champion, and he does violence to them only at the capstone of a long series of desperate attempts to maintain his rule. If the tyrant comes to be surrounded by only the most worthless human beings and hated by the best, that is not by choice.

Yet at the same time Socrates seems to undermine this claim with his poetic quotation. While Socrates' sarcastic claim that the wise with whom the tyrant associates must be the worthless slavish men in the city has the surface impression of being a critique of the tyrant, his remarks also serve to remind the reader that the tyrant may be of particular interest to a certain kind of good man, namely a foreign wise man who visits the city. If the tyrant is necessarily

enemies with the spirited gentlemen in his society, might this not make a good opportunity to cultivate the friendship of wise, unattached poets? While Socrates suggests that only a poet would stoop to such an association, one cannot help but wonder if such visitors might also include the philosophic. Although Socrates is quick to turn back to blaming the tyrant, it is tempting to think that these foreign guests might serve as important compensation for the tyrant. After all, would it not be these wise guests who are best suited to advising the tyrant on how to solve his problems, a hint which we will see Xenophon pick up on? Thus, the tyrannical man as portrayed in Book Eight is not necessarily a wholly vicious one but is one with such a strong desire to maintain his position of leadership that he is willing to resort to any means. In fact, the desirous and extravagant character that will make up the core of the tyrannical soul in Book Nine is briefly alluded to only once in this account (589e). The sensibility of this description of the tyrant in Book Eight makes it all the more surprising that Socrates' psychological comparison of the tyrant and the philosopher in Book Nine seems to portray a very different man.

## ***Republic Book Nine: The Philosopher and the Tyrant***

Socrates opens Book Nine in an odd way, telling Glaucon that they will turn now to consider the tyrant himself, speaking as if he has not already taken up the tyrant himself and the question of his happiness as well as that of the city (466d). However, before beginning to make his comparison, Socrates first returns to an articulation of the human desires, a subject which he had discussed earlier in Book Eight. He divides human desires into two types: necessary and unnecessary desires. The necessary desires are of two kinds, those that we are unable to turn aside—such as hunger and thirst—and those whose satisfaction benefits us (558d). While some of the necessary desires may fall into both of these categories, Socrates distinguishes them clearly as separate standards of what makes a desire necessary. The unnecessary desires, on the other hand, are described by Socrates in Book Eight as those desires of which a man could rid himself if he were to practice from youth and whose presence does either no good or harms him (559a). In other words, for a desire to be unnecessary it must be one that could be eliminated from the human soul through habit and that is either useless or harmful. It is this latter kind of desire, the unnecessary, that Socrates takes up again at the beginning of Book Nine. The necessary desires, however, are not expounded upon, suggesting that we must bear in mind the twofold definition presented in Book Eight. Socrates introduces a new type of unnecessary desires, asserting that of the unnecessary pleasures and desires there are some that are hostile to law and come to be in everyone, but that can be checked by laws and the law-abiding desires so that they are eliminated or seriously weakened (571b). For those who are unable to weaken these desires, strong ones remain, driving men to every sort of vicious act. These desires are those which express themselves most intensely when that part of the soul which has suppressed them—the calculating and ruling part—sleeps. These unnecessary desires, gorged with either

food or drink, push sleep aside and compel men to all sorts of shameless acts (571c-d). In contrast to the man who is driven by these unnecessary desires while he sleeps, Socrates describes a man who has a healthy relationship to himself.

“First, he awakens his calculating part and feasts it on fair arguments and considerations, coming to an understanding with himself; second, he feeds the desiring part in such a way that it is neither in want nor surfeited—in order that it will rest and not disturb the best part by its joys or pains, but rather leave that best part alone pure and by itself, to consider and to long for the perception of something that it doesn’t know, either something that has been, or is, or is going to be; and third, he soothes the spirited part in the same way and does not fall asleep with his spirit aroused because there are some he got angry at.” (571e-572b).

Such a man, Socrates claims, will take his rest only when he has done these things and in doing so will least be bothered by those desires hostile to law. In sum, Socrates concludes, there is some amount of these lawless desires in every man, even those who appear to be most measured (572b).

The reason for Socrates’ rather abrupt return to a consideration of the human desires seems to have been to introduce this image of the healthy man. The image of the well-ordered soul serves as the standard in light of which the lives of the tyrant and the philosopher will be judged as Book Nine progresses, and thus it is of particular importance that we understand how such a man differs from the one tormented by desires as he sleeps. As Socrates indicates at the end of this discussion, it is not the case that the natures of the two souls are somehow fundamentally different. Each has the same sorts of desires and the same tripartite soul that relates to these desires, but what differs between the two is their relationship to these desires (572b).<sup>16</sup> What makes the soul healthy is not the good fortune of being born without desire or

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<sup>16</sup> For an impressive interpretation of this section’s significance for the traditional understanding of Plato’s account of the desires and the tripartite soul see Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City*, 213-216. Most importantly, Arruzza highlights

spiritedness, or even being born with especially healthy desires or an especially clear mind, but possession of a moderation that does service to the desiring and thumotic parts of the soul before moving on to higher considerations. This characterization of the healthy soul would be compelling to Socrates' initial interlocutor, the gentlemanly Adeimantus, who would be pleased by the willful moderation of desires that Socrates' account appears to emphasize.

Yet, if one considers the account more closely, that this picture of the soul is agreeable to a traditional view of moderation is not so clear. Socrates insists that although the well-ordered soul will not overindulge these lawless desires, it will indulge them to the extent that is necessary for preventing them from interfering with the intellectual activity that it holds to be best (572e). The extent to which this must be done will depend upon the particular individual and the "understanding with himself" that he reaches (571e). This would suggest that while some may come to understand that they have very little need for satisfying these desires, others may realize that their particular disposition compels them to spend much more time in their service. This would imply that no universal or civically prescribed standard of moderation can be truly valid and that the moderation of the desires, both of the desiring part of ourselves and the thumotic honor loving part, will depend on the particular spiritual needs of each individual. If this is the case, it opens the question of whether generally condemnable practices, even tyranny, might not be good for certain individuals. Could there be a moderate tyranny in which the well-ordered soul recognizes a need to satisfy certain lawless desires in addition to its want for other ends? Could these lawless desires make up a bigger part of what drives the well-ordered soul to intellectual activity than we typically admit? What makes this treatment of the desires even more radical is Socrates' repeated suggestion that all human beings have some degree of these lawless

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the fact that this passage suggests that human desires are not simply appetitive in their character but can come from the thumotic and calculating parts of the soul as well.



unnecessary desires in their soul (571b, 572b). In light of this, it would appear that these lawless desires, which seemed to be introduced by Socrates as a subsection of the unnecessary desires, are in fact part of that group of necessary desires that human beings are not able to turn aside (558e). Thus, it would seem that the standard of evaluation in Socrates' view is not which way of life participates in the right desires and pleasures, but which way of life enables one to achieve this state of spiritual health in which the desires are satisfied to an extent such that they do not interfere with the activity one considers best.

It is with a view to this standard that Socrates begins his account of the character of the tyrannical soul, one which differs from what we have seen in Book Eight. Most significantly, Socrates' account of the tyrannical soul focuses on how love (*ἔρως*), which was nowhere to be found in his account in Book Eight, is the primary psychic drive of the tyrant and how this love engages with the lawless desires. Love enters into the tyrant's soul as a young man through the corruption of a group who Socrates calls the dread enchanters and serves as the leader of the lawless desires (572e, 573e). The lawless desires spur on the tyrant's love, fostering in him a longing for their satisfaction, to the point of madness (573a-b). Thus, love and the lawless desires appear to form a positive feedback loop within the tyrant's soul. The tyrant's love directs the lawless desires which in turn demand to be satisfied more and more by the tyrant. This eventually leads to the point that the tyrant, Socrates claims, resembles a drunken man; his perception is obscured by his erotic indulgence in the lawless desires (573b). The tyrant is driven by his *ἔρως* to harm those closest to him, even harming his parents for the sake of a new concubine or boyfriend (574c). Additionally, if the city over which the tyrant rules will not submit itself to his rule and the satisfaction of his desires, the tyrant will bring in foreign soldiers to punish his fatherland (575d). Thus, Socrates concludes, a man becomes tyrannic in the precise

sense when he becomes erotic and it is by means of ἔρως that a tyranny comes to be established (573c, 574e).<sup>17</sup>

While Socrates makes quite clear that it is love which defines the tyrannical soul, he is shockingly quiet regarding the character of tyrannical love. Most conspicuously, the object of tyrannical ἔρως is never mentioned, leaving the reader in the dark regarding this crucial dimension of his account of tyranny. In other words, if it is ἔρως that defines the tyrannical man and turns a regime into a tyranny, recognizing the character of this ἔρως and what it is directed toward is essential to understanding the Platonic teaching on tyranny. Further, if we are to know if the psychological comparison of the tyrant and the philosopher is valid, it is necessary to know how exactly love might lead an individual to such a spiritual condition. It is thus quite surprising that Plato gives no further elaboration of tyrannical ἔρως itself beyond its relationship to the lawless desires and the account of the tyrannical life that it leads to.

This picture of the tyrant becomes even more questionable when one considers it in light of Socrates' treatment of the tyrant in Book Eight. Both tyrannical ἔρως and his enslavement to the lawless desires, the two most prominent dimensions of the psychology of the tyrant in Book Nine, are not so much as mentioned in the earlier account. Additionally, the story of the tyrant's upbringing is entirely different. While in Book Eight the tyrant was an eager and willing leader, in Book Nine he is led on the path to tyranny as a young man by a group of corruptors. Political motives have entirely dropped out and the question seems to be how this non-ambitious person could ever get dragged into becoming tyrant. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how a man who is so savagely enslaved to his base desires could possibly be the same man who Socrates described

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<sup>17</sup> These textual details are what lead me to conclude that the tyrant's intense desirousness cannot begin after he has acquired political power as Arruzza suggests. The timeline as presented by Plato is one in which the tyrant is corrupted as a young man; he is a slave to his desires and his eros prior to any engagement with political life.

before. In Book Eight, the man who became a tyrant was not indulgent or weak-willed but rather a shrewd yet charismatic leader capable of negotiating complex political circumstances to his own benefit. His turn to tyranny was not motivated by a slavish addiction to the fulfillment of the basest desires in the human soul but rather by an excessive ambition to rule over his city. It is doubtful that the type of man described in Book Nine, the ἔρως addict with no control of his desires, could possibly come to tyrannical power through the subtle political machinations described in the earlier account. It is even a question if such an extremely desirous man even describes the political tyrant once he has seized power. Is it not the case that there is a limit to the human desires? Do we not see tyrants who in fact do manage to satisfy a great many of their lesser desires while living out their lives at the head of their cities? In other words, while it may be true that the tyrant has large number of lesser desires and that it is difficult for him to satisfy them, the successful tyrant may in fact satisfy a greater number of these desires than other men. The successful tyrant may very well be, in a certain way, happier than the average man. Thus, there is reason to suspect that the man who becomes a political tyrant described in Book Eight is not the same as the man with the tyrannical soul described here in Book Nine. However, if this is the case, who this latter type of man describes is at this point unclear.

## The Three Proofs

While a comparison of the philosopher and the tyrant may be immediately relevant to our interests, its introduction into the conversation of the *Republic* requires some effort on Socrates' part. After the discussion of tyrannical ἔργος, Glaucon inserts himself into the conversation and remains the primary interlocutor for the rest of Book Nine. While the reasons for Glaucon's interruption are not entirely clear, one cannot help but suspect that the depiction of the tyrant as an erotic man is particularly interesting to Glaucon, who as one sees elsewhere in the *Republic* is an erotic man himself. Additionally, one must remember Glaucon's long speech from Book Two and his demand that Socrates show him that the supremely unjust man lives most poorly of all.<sup>18</sup> Socrates begins his comparison of the two ways of life by abstracting to the level of their corresponding regime. It had been agreed before that the character of each soul would be in the same state as its corresponding regime, and so Socrates asks Glaucon to compare the tyrannical regime to the kingly regime with respect to happiness in order to discover which type of soul is truly most happy. Glaucon agrees that it must be the kingly regime, and thus the kingly man, who is most happy while the tyrannical regime is full of wretchedness. Yet, despite Glaucon's earnest agreement, Socrates proceeds from this point to three proofs of the superiority of the philosophic life that take up the bulk of the remainder of Book Nine. These three proofs look not to the happiness of the regimes, but to the happiness within the individual men. This exchange between Socrates and Glaucon, while brief, reveals a great deal about the character of this conversation. Most obviously, Socrates acknowledges that the evaluation that is to follow will look to uncover which of the two ways of life is superior with respect to happiness (577a). While pleasure will play an important role in determining which way of life is happiest, Plato's

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<sup>18</sup> Bloom, *Interpretive Essay*, 423-425.

treatment of tyranny acknowledges from the beginning that pleasure may not be the sole standard of evaluating the best way of life. Yet, that there is a rhetorical need for Socrates to present the comparison of philosophic and tyrannical life is not at all clear. Glaucon has already agreed with Socrates that the tyrannical regime is most wretched, and so on the basis of their agreement that the character of each regime corresponds to the character of the individual soul it would seem that the philosophic life triumphs over the tyrannical in the eyes of his interlocutors. In fact, the suggestion that there is a need to look to the individual man cuts against one of the crucial arguments in the *Republic* as a whole, that the individual soul can be understood through an evaluation of the regime. Rather than serving a rhetorical purpose within the text, the arguments in Book Nine risk jeopardizing one of Socrates' largest rhetorical purpose within the dialogue. While Socrates' reasons for doing this are not entirely clear, the overall effect of these arguments is to emphasize, perhaps unjustifiably so, the hardships faced by the tyrant. In light of the other rhetorical goal of Socrates in the *Republic* to dissuade his interlocutors, and Glaucon in particular, of their tyrannical ambitions, one cannot help but wonder if Socrates has begun to employ these less rigorous arguments in an attempt to shore up the opinions of his audience against future temptations. Thus, as we look to Socrates' comparison of the philosopher and the tyrant we must try to parse the serious teaching from Socrates' highly sophistic arguments.

The rhetorical trickiness of this section of the text is apparent from the outset of Socrates' first proof. Having just made clear to Glaucon the need to "creep into a man's disposition and see through it" to accurately assess the happiness of the tyrant, Socrates again retreats to the argument that they can come to know the soul of the tyrant through an investigation of the tyrannical regime (577a, 577d). Because the city under a tyrant lives in a condition of slavery, poverty, and fear, Socrates convinces Glaucon that the same conditions must exist within the

soul of the tyrant himself (577c, 577e, 578a). This argument is incredibly dubious. When Glaucon agrees that the city under tyranny is poor, he is surely not talking about the tyrant himself. Yet based on this, Socrates goes on to claim that the tyrannical soul is poverty-ridden as well. How could one imagine that these two uses of the word poor describe the same thing? Further, in characterizing the city ruled by tyranny as slavish, Socrates prompts Glaucon to admit that it is the tyrant himself who rules over them as master (577c). To argue that the tyrant's ruling as master over his citizens means that the tyrant's own soul will be in a condition of slavery is a difficult thing to accept.

And yet, after having begun by presenting these questionable arguments regarding the character of the tyrannical soul, Socrates presents a series of much more convincing arguments as he turns to an examination of the tyrannical man. This characterization of the tyrant is aimed explicitly at answering the question of whether the tyrannical way of life is good or bad (578c). The question of the best way of life comes clearly to the fore of the dialogue. Socrates describes the tyrant's position as being like that of a man who must constantly fear attacks from the slaves that he rules. The tyrant rules over his city as a master over slaves and thus feels that he lives surrounded by enemies (579a). Fear compels him to fawn over his servants for protection, lowering himself to the status of one who serves servants. The tyrant is poor in that despite his material wealth, his gourmand desires get little satisfaction because of the prison of fear in which he lives. He is unable to travel and see the beautiful sights that other free men desire to see but is instead stuck in his own home for fear of leaving (579b). Thus, the tyrannical soul does indeed share the same characteristics of slavery, fear, and poverty as the tyrannical regime, although in very different forms.

Socrates' first proof depicts the tyrant as one who is compelled by his lawless desires to live in a condition of slavery and fear. Further, if these desires have become especially great in the tyrannical soul, as Socrates suggests will be the case, the continual need to deny them would seem to constitute a real lack, or poverty, within the tyrant. Thus, even the soul of the best tyrant is in a certain respect fearful, poor, and lacking in freedom. However, the extent of these conditions is based on the feverish desires that Socrates has asserted will be characteristic of the tyrannical man. Thus, if the intensity of these desires in the political tyrant is overstated, as we have already been given reason to believe may be the case, so too would the conditions of fear, poverty, and slavery in the political tyrant be exaggerated by Socrates. In fact, as we have already noted, the soul described here by Socrates bears more resemblance to the city that is commanded like a slave than the tyrant who rules it as master. Thus, in light of the much more sensible account of the man who rules as tyrant given in Book Eight, one is compelled to conclude that the image of the tyrannical soul painted here by Socrates is not meant to describe the tyrant himself. Instead, what Socrates refers to as the tyrannical soul appears to describe the soul that is itself tyrannized. Such a soul is the very opposite of the kingly philosophic soul in which the calculating part rules; it is the supremely unhealthy soul that is ruled over by the lowest human desires. Thus, rather than critiquing life as lived by the political tyrant, Socrates' account of the tyrannical soul in Book Nine seems to serve two functions: it serves both the rhetorical purpose of countering Glaucon's attraction to tyranny and as a negative standard against which the philosophic soul will be compared in the two remaining proofs, both of which focus not on the tyrannical soul but on that of the philosopher.

Socrates' second proof focuses on pleasure, dividing human pleasures into three kinds corresponding to the three parts of the human soul (580d). Each part of the soul—the thumotic

part, the calculating part, and the desiring part—has a single pleasure peculiar to it and thus desires peculiar to it as well (580d-e). Rather than the strict division of the soul presented at the end of Book Four, this account of the soul resembles more closely the blended account of the soul that Socrates initially presented in the dialogue—the soul is not strictly divided into antagonistic parts but is a complex whole with intermixing desires and pleasures (436a-b). The three major components of the soul—the calculating, the spirited, and the desiring elements—are still maintained in this presentation, but the harsh line between the desires, the thumos, and the calculating part of man has begun to erode with each part instead having its own type of desire.<sup>19</sup> On the basis of these distinct desires, each of the parts of the soul can be said to have a love (φιλία) particular to it.<sup>20</sup> The desiring part of the soul loves money and gain most of all as these things best satisfy its simple desires. The thumotic part of the soul loves mastery, victory, and good reputation. Lastly, that part of our soul with which we learn, the calculating part, loves learning and wisdom (581a-c). Thus, the three parts of the soul can be said to be desire-loving, honor-loving, and wisdom-loving (philosophic) respectively. Because different parts of the soul rule in different human beings, Socrates asserts that the three primary classes of human beings can be divided in this same way. The gain-loving man, the honor loving man, and the philosophic man will each have a form of pleasure underlying his particular disposition (581c). It is important to note that while Socrates refers to these as different types of human beings, these different types are not so much fundamental differences in the makeup of human souls but rather variations in the degree to which different souls enjoy a particular pleasure. However, this distinction of human types raises a problem in determining which way of life is best, as each type of man will hold his own pleasure to be best. The lover of gain will have no concern for learning

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<sup>19</sup> Again, consider Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City*, 213-216.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bertman, “Plato on Tyranny”, 152-153.



or honor unless they make him money, the lover of honor will hold the pleasure of gain to be vulgar and the pleasure of learning to be useless unless it brings him honor, and the philosopher will hold these other pleasures as choiceworthy only insofar as it is necessary for him to satisfy them. It is worth noting that of the three types of men described by Socrates the philosopher is alone in acknowledging each of the three types of pleasures as genuinely pleasant. But how, Socrates asks, can we know which of these men speaks truly (581d-582a)?

In asking this question, the conversation in the *Republic* acknowledges the challenge of how one can judge between various ways of life in light of competing claims from different types of human beings as to the pleasantness of the particular way of life to which their character inclines them. In other words, here Plato recognizes a challenge to philosophy that is all too common today, that the answer to the question the best way of life is relative to the particular nature of each individual. Yet, what is so striking about the Platonic account is that while Socrates acknowledges the challenge of the variety of human types here in his second proof, he does not accept the relativistic conclusion toward which so many of our contemporary thinkers are inclined. Instead, Socrates seeks to demonstrate to Glaucon in his later two proofs how the philosophic way of life can be said to be best while still acknowledging the great diversity of human types and human pleasures.

In speaking here of human types, one may be led to believe that Socrates has seriously modified the picture of the soul he presented to Adeimantus (572a). Whereas before Socrates stressed the fundamental similarity of the desires within all human souls, the division of human beings into types in the second proof may lead some to question if Socrates is now suggesting that there are basic differences in the kinds of desires experienced by different people. In other

words, might this divisions of human types suggest that the philosopher is simply born with no other desires than those of the intellect? While it is true that Socrates' image of the soul has changed significantly in this second proof from the version he presented to Adeimantus, the difference is primarily in emphasis. We have already questioned the homogeneity of human souls stressed by Socrates earlier and this division of human souls into types seems to be confirmation of this interpretation. The different types of souls vary wildly in the degree to which they experience different types of desires. In the picture given in the second proof, it is not so much that there are fundamental differences in the kinds of desires of each human type but there are very great differences in the degree to which the human types desire different things. In other words, the types of souls have the same kinds of desires, but there are great differences in the extent to which they experience various desires—the satisfaction of one kind of desire may be trivial to one type of person but all consuming for another. This difference in degree may even be so vast that when comparing two types of people a particular desire may seem non-existent in one in light of its obvious presence in the other. Thus, the two men's lives would differ greatly in their need to pursue the satisfaction of this desire. This discussion of human types helps us to see more clearly the nuanced account of the soul given in Book Nine. Neither is it the case that all human beings are simply the same in their desires, nor is it the case that some individuals are fundamentally different in their natures. Instead, the Socratic treatment of the soul in Book Nine acknowledges the great diversity in souls of individual human beings while at the same time maintaining the fundamental kinship found in our shared human nature. While Socrates does quietly suggest at the very beginning of Book Nine that a select few people may be able to eliminate the lawless desires within themselves through the use of argument, he maintains throughout the conversation that no man has the divine fortune of being born without them.

To settle the dispute between the different human types, Socrates and Glaucon agree that if a thing is to be finely judged it must be judged by experience, prudence, and argument (582a). Of the three types of human beings they have described, the philosophic man comes to sight as most experienced in all the pleasures. He will experience the bodily pleasures from a young age and will experience the pleasure of being honored through being honored for his wisdom. But, unlike the lover of honor and the lover of gain, the philosopher will have experience of the pleasure which comes from knowing and from learning the natural characteristics of the things which are (582b, 582c). Additionally, of these three men it will be the philosopher who gains his experience in the company of prudence. Because it is through the characteristic tool of the philosophic way of life, argument, that judgments must be made, what the philosopher praises must be truly good. Thus, because the philosopher is most competent with respect to experience, prudence, and argument he is both the most qualified judge of which way of life is best as well as the most sovereign praiser insofar as his praise is always grounded on his good judgment (582d-583a).

While one might argue that this second proof, especially in the case of Glaucon's statements, is somewhat starry-eyed in its praise of the intellectual pleasures, the argument as a whole is a compelling one. The philosophic way of life does in truth appear to be the only way of life with experience in all three of the types of human pleasure. The physical pleasures are available to some degree to all human beings and Socrates rightly points out that the wise are often honored for their wisdom. Further, insofar as we agree that we want to judge which way of life is best in light of the truth, the philosopher, whose life is devoted to the pursuit of truth and who is best equipped to understand the arguments in favor of each way of life, would seem best suited to this task. The question of the best way of life is not at its core concerned with what the

wealthy or those honored in the city claim is best but is instead directed toward real knowledge or truth about the matter. For this reason, all men would agree that it is those who have knowledge or wisdom by whom they want their life to be judged as good. Thus, the philosopher's praise would be especially meaningful because it is based upon his good judgment. At the very least it would seem right to conclude that one who is concerned with being praised for being truly excellent would value the praise of the philosopher most highly of all.<sup>21</sup> Yet, while it may be true that the philosopher is the man best suited for judging between various ways of life, this does not necessarily mean that the philosophic way of life is best. Perhaps it is the case that while the philosopher pursues his own way of life because of a peculiarity of his disposition he simultaneously acknowledges that another way of life is on the whole more choiceworthy for a human being. Alternatively, perhaps a certain degree of philosophic activity is necessary in human life for the sake of judging which way of life is best to pursue but in the best cases this philosophic activity gives way to other concerns once that judgment has been made. Both of these possibilities raise the question of how the philosopher evaluates competing ways of life. The second proof only provides the vague answer of prudence, which is assumed in a single sentence of the proof to be characteristic of the philosopher. In other words, while the second proof provides a compelling case that the philosophic way of life possesses the tools best suited to judge which way of life is truly best and most pleasant, how exactly it employs those tools remains at this point unclear.

Socrates' third and final proof, while complex, seeks to answer this question. It begins with Socrates' claim that the pleasures other than those enjoyed by the prudent man are not entirely true but are like a sort of shadow painting (583b). His argument for this begins by

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<sup>21</sup> Consider *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b 25.

getting Glaucon to agree that there is a state of the soul that rests between pain and pleasure, a sort of neutral state (583c). The two also agree that it is often the case that those who are in pain call their being released from pain pleasure, while those who are experiencing pleasure call the cessation of that pleasure pain. In truth, however, being brought back to this neutral state of the soul cannot be said to really be pain or pleasure, but only appears to be so relative to the previous state that the soul was in (583d-584a). In fact, most of what people call pleasures in the human soul are actually an alleviation of pain (584c). Socrates employs a helpful metaphor, comparing the three states to positions of up, down, and middle. A man who is from a downward region might think that he is moving to the upward region when being brought to the middle position, but the true upward position is elsewhere (584d). The same holds of human fulfillment, which Socrates equates with pleasure in this proof. A man that is in a state of pain will suppose that being brought back to the soul's state of rest is fulfillment, but true fulfillment and pleasure lie elsewhere (585a). However, at this point, Socrates' argument takes a sophistic turn. As hunger and thirst are emptiness of the body's condition, Socrates claims, ignorance and imprudence are emptiness of the soul. Thus, intelligence is the fullness of the soul (585b). Next, he gets Glaucon to agree that because true fullness is a fullness of the things which really are, and because the things which really are are the immortal, true, and unchanging beings which participate in knowledge, genuine human fulfillment is the acquisition of knowledge and truth (585c-d).<sup>22</sup> Thus, Socrates concludes, those who have no experience of prudence or virtue but who are always living with feasts and the like, men like the tyrant, are like cattle who fatten themselves, wandering between the lower position of pain and the middle position, which they mistake to be pleasure (586a). Further, the pleasures they live with are necessarily mixed with some pain, as is

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<sup>22</sup> For more thorough treatments of the ontological status of philosophic pleasure see Wolfsdorf, "Pleasure and Truth", and Bertman, "Plato on Tyranny", 155-158.

also the case with the thumotic part of the soul when it pursues honor without calculation or prudence (586c). However, those men who are followers of knowledge and argument will indulge their desires for gain and for honor only to the extent that their prudential part leads, allowing them to avoid these accompanying pains and to partake only in true pleasure (586 d-e). Thus, it is only in the philosophic soul that each part can enjoy its own pleasures in the truest way and to the greatest possible extent.

The most serious dimension of Socrates' final proof is its explanation of why the pleasures claimed to be experienced by the tyrant are judged by the philosopher to be less choiceworthy than his own. The tyrant who is led about by his desires is like the sort of man described from 583b-586a who understands himself to be receiving real pleasure but is in truth only alleviating a pain. His tyrannical *ἐρως* and the other desires that this stirs up drive him to tyrannical life which, at its best, can fulfill them to a certain extent, but he mistakes the alleviation from the pull of these desires for real pleasure and human fulfillment. In other words, because the tyrannical soul is so full of pains caused by the constant pull of his lawless desires and his desire to be loved, he mistakes the alleviation of these pains through tyrannical life as genuine human fulfillment. He is a slave to these desires—they prevent him from finding genuine fulfillment. This once again cuts against the suggestion that the tyrannical soul and philosophic soul are different in nature. It is rather that they are different in character, holding different pleasures best, but that the tyrannical soul is just mistaken about what would truly be most fulfilling for it if it could get control of its rampant desires. However, Socrates once again makes clear that the philosopher does not deny that there are genuine pleasures of both the desiring and the thumotic parts of the human soul and that he will participate in these pleasures. The philosophic soul according to Socrates is not characterized by a stoic asceticism that denies

basic pleasures and that of honor, nor does it simply transcend the desire for these pleasures, but rather the soul of the philosopher indulges these pleasures only to the extent that it is good for it to do so. The extent of this indulgence would vary depending upon the individual character of different human beings, but the philosophic man would never indulge these pleasures more than prudence dictates. To the average man this might look like the height of austerity, as the philosophic man would enjoy only the most simple pleasures of food and seek honor from only a select few, but in truth the philosopher indulges all of his desires to whatever extent is necessary for him to be able to pursue the goods he holds to be best. What appears to the many as bondage is in truth an incredible liberty. Additionally, even if we are correct in our assertion that the tyrannical soul described in Book Nine is not that of the political tyrant himself but is rather the supremely unhealthy tyrannized soul, the argument implies that every type of human soul, including the tyrant, lies somewhere between this tyrannized soul and that of the philosopher. Even if the tyrant's soul is not as unhealthy as the one described by Socrates at the beginning of Book Nine, the argument suggests that some tension exists in the soul of the tyrant because of his unexamined desires. He too is not free. Looking back to Book Eight, one sees that the political tyrant, who most of all desires to rule, is led by his ambition into a prison of violence and revenge. Unlike the other ways of life, it is only the philosopher who can truly be said to be free from the command of his desires to pursue what it is that he holds to be his highest good. Thus, the philosopher comes to sight as the only man who can consistently meet the standard set by Socrates at 572c. The philosophic life is the only way of life able to recognize and satisfy the necessary desires of the other parts of his soul, including the basic human desires for sensual pleasures as well as honor. The philosopher will understand himself enough to satisfy what his particular soul demands of these desires while ensuring that they do not inhibit his pursuit of the

good he holds highest, which in the philosophic life is invariably wisdom. Above all, as the third proof suggests, pursuit of this wisdom would entail a philosophic desire for clarity and freedom from the natural human condition of ignorance about reality. There is no tension in the philosopher's soul between what he holds to be truly best for him and the experience of the pleasures of the other parts of his soul. It is in this sense that the classical outlook understands the philosophic life to be better than tyrannical life: philosophic life holds out the possibility of complete spiritual fulfillment through recognition and satisfaction of the necessary needs of one's own soul through prudentially guided introspection and self-knowledge.

However, while this claim may be easy to accept in the case of the simple bodily desires, the philosopher's relationship to the pleasure of honor is more questionable in several respects. In Socrates' metaphorical representation of the soul in the conclusion to Book Nine it is the image of the lion, which represents the thumotic part of the soul, that is said by Socrates to be the greatest in size. This suggests that the desire for honor may be both the greatest desire within the human soul and the most difficult to adequately satisfy, raising the question of how the philosophic life could satisfy his desire for honor in such a way that it does not conflict with the desire to know the truth (588d). In other words, while Socrates may claim that the philosopher's desire for honor will not interfere with his pursuit of wisdom, might it not be the case that the pursuit of honor necessarily conflicts with his pursuit of other goods in some circumstances? As Socrates has presented the philosophic soul its desire for honor must be in complete harmony with its desire to know the truth, but what does such an honor look like?

While Socrates does not provide us with a simple statement, several pregnant suggestions throughout Book Nine help to clue one into the Platonic answer. Socrates sums up the



philosopher's relationship to the pleasure of honor in the final page of Book Nine, stating that he will willingly partake in those honors which he believes will make him better while fleeing those that would overturn his established habits (592a). These habits themselves, Socrates suggests, are especially worthy of honor (591b). Thus, the philosopher will pursue honors that reinforce the activity of his own way of life and aid in making him better. While Socrates does not explicitly acknowledge what this honor is, in saying that it must not interfere with the philosopher's existing habits it would seem that it could only be honor for his progress with respect to wisdom. In fact, Socrates already asserted that the wise will be honored for their wisdom in his second proof. There, however, it was the many who honored the wise man whom they praised alongside the wealthy and the courageous (582c). Yet such honor, insofar as it comes from the many who praise even the life of the wealthy man alongside that of the philosopher, cannot be what the philosopher values. Even if such praise did not interfere with his own habits, the honor that comes from the many would be praise from those who are not competent judges. In other words, while the many might praise the philosopher for what they understand to be wisdom, the fact that they praise the wealthy man as well betrays that they do not understand what genuine human excellence consists in. Because the philosopher cannot trust the many to properly judge if he is worthy of praise for his wisdom, the honor that comes from them cannot be said to make him better and thus fails to meet the standard established by Socrates in the conclusion to Book Nine (592a). If the philosopher is to be made better by being honored for his wisdom, such praise must come from those who can correctly assess his intellectual progress.

Thus, it must be honor from the philosophic, who the second proof has shown us are the only truly sovereign judges, that the philosopher desires. The philosopher will take pleasure in being honored by the philosophic, which may even include himself, for his progress toward

wisdom and will be able to take this praise as well-grounded confirmation of his improvement. All of this means that the philosopher is able to enjoy the pleasure of honor in such a way that will never be at odds with or entail a sacrifice of what he holds to be his greatest good, his pursuit of wisdom. Thus, while the philosopher is praised by the wise simply for being who he is and pursuing what it is that he thinks is best, alternative forms of honor may require a sacrifice of other individual goods. The philosophic life thus comes to sight as more choiceworthy at least insofar as it results in a spiritual condition in which all of the various kinds of desires within the soul can be satisfied in such a way that they do not conflict with the pursuit of what the philosopher holds to be best for him. The philosophic life, and the philosophic soul, are unified and consistent in a way that the tyrant is not.

Thus, while the rhetorical effect of Books Eight and Nine is surely to leave Socrates' interlocutors convinced that the life of the tyrant is, as Socrates puts it, 729 times less pleasant than that of the philosopher, a more sober consideration of these arguments suggests that the life of the tyrant is hardly on the table (587e). While Book Eight does seem to provide a preliminary statement on the character of the man who rules as tyrant, the psychological analysis that takes place in Book Nine does not appear to portray the tyrant himself but rather the supremely unhealthy soul that is tyrannized by the combination of *ἐρος* and the lawless desires. By contrasting this tyrannized soul with that of the philosopher, Socrates subtly demonstrates to the reader how the philosophic life is able to fully overcome the tensions within the unhealthy soul through the prudential recognition and satisfaction of the various necessary desires. In satisfying only the desires of the parts of his soul to the extent that is truly necessary, the philosopher achieves a kind of inner harmony that allows for the unhindered pursuit of what he holds to be his greatest good. Because the tyrannized soul and the philosophic soul represent the total

disharmony of the soul and its full unity, the argument in Book Nine of the *Republic* also suggests that every human type, including the political tyrant, will possess some degree of inner tension and thus lie somewhere between these extremes. Yet, while the *Republic* may be convincing in its demonstration of the choiceworthiness of the philosophic life and the standard by which that choice is to be made, its critique of tyranny leaves much to be desired. Socrates' argument implies that the tyrant is flawed in crucial respects, falling short of the psychic order achieved by the philosopher, but by using the tyrannical soul as a medium for discussing the supremely unhealthy soul the shortcomings of the political tyrant himself go largely unexamined. Socrates seems to believe that the soul of the tyrant is necessarily inferior to that of the philosopher, but to understand why he believes this would require an understanding of the disharmony within the tyrant's soul. Thus, for those who wish to fully understand why tyrannical life is not choiceworthy, a question made all the more compelling by Glaucon's passionate speech from Book Two, it would appear that the *Republic* alone may not be a sufficient guide. What is required is a philosophic treatment of the tyrant as he appears to us in political reality and an exposition of the competing desires within his soul that necessitate his failure to meet the standard set by the philosopher in the *Republic*.

### III. XENOPHON'S *HIERO*: THE CLASSICAL CRITIQUE OF TYRANNY

To find such a treatment of political tyranny we must turn away from the ornate rhetoric of Plato to the more sober writing of Xenophon. Unlike the *Republic*, Xenophon's *Hiero* is a dialogue devoted solely to the subject of tyranny, a difference made apparent by the change in setting. While the *Republic* takes place at a gathering of intellectually inclined gentlemen of democratic Athens, the *Hiero* depicts a private conversation between a tyrant and the foreign poet Simonides. In other words, tyranny as it is lived in reality by the political man is at the fore of the *Hiero* while within the *Republic* tyranny only serves as a small part of a much broader theoretical consideration of justice. The *Hiero* is easily divided into three major sections: the introduction, Hiero's indictment of tyranny, and Simonides' praise of the good tyrant. The introduction is the briefest of the three, spanning only the first eight sentences of the first of the dialogue's eleven chapters, yet is at the same time the basis of the whole work (1.1-1.8). The introduction familiarizes us with the characters of the dialogue, explains the circumstances of their coming together, and elaborates the standard in light of which tyranny will be evaluated within the conversation.<sup>23</sup> The second section, Hiero's indictment of tyranny, is by far the longest, making up more than half of the dialogue, and extends until the end of the seventh chapter (1.9-7.10). This section, reminiscent of Socrates' treatment of tyranny in Book Nine, examines the failure of tyrannical rule by the standard of pleasure, the tyrant's deep desire to be loved, and his relative lack of concern for honor in comparison with the wise man. Simonides' response to this indictment picks up here and continues until the end of the dialogue (7.10-11.15). In this section, we are presented with Simonides' practical prescriptions for improving a tyrannical regime and a praise of the beneficent tyrant. Yet, at the same time, this final section of

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<sup>23</sup> Although I do not agree with many of the interpretive points of Fertik, "The Absent Landscape in Xenophon's *Hiero*", the piece provides an extensive and interesting analysis of the *Hiero*'s dialectical setting.

the dialogue also contains a critique of tyrannical life that is more subtle and much deeper than that given by Hiero.

However, while Xenophon's critique of tyranny is elusive and requires a great deal of careful reading, the surface of the *Hiero* gives the overwhelming impression that the dialogue is meant to be a praise of the good tyrant's life over the private life that at the same time condemns selfish tyrants like Hiero. But, assuming for the moment that Xenophon's teaching in the *Hiero* is, in fact, a critique of tyranny, why would Xenophon wish to give such a contrary impression? To answer this question, we must consider the intended audience of the dialogue. Given the dialogue's explicitly political subject matter, it seems likely that the vast majority of the *Hiero*'s readers would have been politically interested individuals. Yet, given the theoretical character inherent in such a work, it would likely have appealed less to the pragmatic mind of an established political figure and more to open-minded young men with blossoming political ambitions of their own. The *Hiero* directs the ambitions of such a reader away from the fulfillment of simple physical desires and toward rule for the sake of love and praise from all men. In other words, it directs their political ambition to a much higher, a much nobler end. In the best cases, however, the subtle critique of tyranny that is present in the *Hiero* might cause the reader to reconsider whether tyrannical life is truly the best way to reach such lofty ends.

## Xenophon's Introduction

Thus, with these broader considerations in mind, we may turn at last to the text of the *Hiero*. To understand the dramatic setting of the *Hiero* we must begin with those details told to us by the narrator in the opening lines of the dialogue. There we learn that Simonides the poet came once upon a time to Hiero the tyrant. After some time, when both had found leisure, Simonides asks Hiero if he would be willing to explain to him the one thing that Hiero knows better than he (1.1-1.2). Hiero is surprised by this request and asks what it is that he might know better than Simonides, a man Hiero considers to be especially wise. Simonides responds that because Hiero has been both a private man and a tyrant he will know better than Simonides how the tyrannical life and the private life differ with respect to human joys and pains. Yet rather than agreeing with this premise, Hiero requests that Simonides, since he is at present still a private man, remind him of the things of private life (1.2-1.3).

While perhaps innocuous at first blush, this opening section of the dialogue reveals a great deal about the dramatic setting of the *Hiero*. To begin with, the narrator identifies the two interlocutors as Simonides, who the narrator calls a poet, and Hiero who he identifies as a tyrant. By beginning the dialogue with the words of this unnamed narrator, Xenophon reminds the reader that neither Simonides nor Hiero speaks as his mouthpiece.<sup>24</sup> Rather than Simonides or Hiero, it seems most natural to me to find Xenophon's voice in the dialogue in this soft-spoken observer. While calling Simonides a poet, the narrator does not call him a wise man or a philosopher, but we see from Hiero that Simonides has a reputation as a wise man, an opinion which Hiero himself shares. Thus, there may be a discrepancy between Hiero and the narrator regarding their assessment of Simonides' wisdom. We also learn from the narrator that

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<sup>24</sup> Gray, "Xenophon's Hiero", and Tymura, "The Bitter Life of a Tyrant", both seem to me to be much too willing to assume that Simonides speaks for Xenophon within the dialogue.

Simonides is the one who has sought out Hiero and the following drama suggests that he has done so for the purposes of having this conversation. In other words, for Simonides, this conversation is one which he has pursued while Hiero may not be so eager to discuss the topic. This reluctance is also implied by Hiero's deflection of Simonides' initial question. This question, which serves as the fulcrum of the entire dialogue, is how the tyrannical life and the private life differ concerning human joys and pains. In other words, Simonides wants to know which of the two ways of life is better. Yet, Simonides does not ask which way of life is better simply, but rather which way of life is better when evaluated by the particular standard of pleasure and pain. This distinction, while evident to the careful reader, seems to go unrecognized by Hiero. In fact, throughout the entirety of the dialogue pleasure as the evaluative standard of the superior way of life goes unchallenged.<sup>25</sup> Thus, while both the *Republic* and the *Hiero* consider the question of the best way of life, the evaluative standard of each dialogue differs. In the *Republic*, it was happiness that Socrates identified as the primary standard of evaluating the superior way of life with pleasure being only a part of that happiness. In the *Hiero*, happiness is not mentioned until the very end of the dialogue and even then it comes from the mouth of Simonides. While Simonides' careful wording of the question suggests that he may be aware that the standard of pleasure may not be the only relevant standard of judging the two ways of life, for Hiero the tyrant pleasure appears to be the evaluative standard of human life par excellence.

Finally, Hiero's deflection of Simonides' question reveals a certain distrust of the poet. Hiero's response is phrased very carefully. He asks if Simonides will refresh his memory by giving him an account of the pleasures and pains of private life "since, at present at least, you are still a private man." Hiero's stress of the temporal character of Simonides' private life seems to

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<sup>25</sup> Some of the difficulties with this standard are acknowledged in the concluding statements of Levy (2018) pp. pp.49-50.

indicate that he suspects Simonides to have tyrannical ambitions of his own—not without good reason. Simonides has sought him out for the purposes of asking which of the two ways of life is best and it is thus understandable for Hiero to suspect that Simonides has done so because he is considering seeking power himself. Thus, while the two men seem perfectly friendly on the surface, it is important to bear in mind Hiero's possible distrust of Simonides.<sup>26</sup> Even if Simonides has no actual interest in ruling, Hiero's distrust of Simonides might still have a powerful effect on the dialogue. If Hiero fears that Simonides may be after his own throne, as we will see more evidence for as the conversation progresses, such fear would surely influence how Hiero characterizes tyrannical life in his indictment of tyranny that is to follow.

The second half of the introduction contains Simonides' response to Hiero's request to be reminded of the pleasures of private life. However, Simonides' reply suggests that there are no pleasures particular to either the private life or the life of the tyrant but rather that the pleasures of the tyrant are multiplied while his pains are lessened (1.7, 1.8). In other words, the conversation assumes that there is only a difference of degree, not a difference of kind, between the pleasures of the two ways of life. Thus, rather than being an enumeration of the "things in private life" Simonides' response to Hiero is, in fact, a broader account of the character of human pleasures and pains. Simonides identifies four kinds of pleasures. He begins by listing the pleasures of sensual experience—sight, hearing, taste, and sex—and asserts that men feel these pleasures through a particular part of their body (1.4). To this group, he adds the pleasure that comes from distinguishing between comparatives such as cold and hot which we feel with the entirety of our body (1.5). Finally, Simonides claims that men enjoy and are pained by what is good and bad sometimes through the soul alone, and at other times through both the soul and body together (1.5-1.6).

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<sup>26</sup> Levy, "An Introduction to the Hiero", 30-32 and Strauss, *On Tyranny*.



Two things stand out in this account of pleasure. First, while Simonides does mention pleasures that are felt through the body as a whole, he makes no mention of pleasures felt *only* by the body. Even the pleasure of sex is listed among those pleasures felt through a part of the body by the soul. Thus, while Simonides does distinguish between the body and the soul, it seems he would deny any sort of stoic claim that there are lower bodily pleasures that one must simply overcome. This might tempt one to conclude that Simonides sees no difference in rank between various pleasures. This conclusion is complicated, however, by the additional fact that Simonides does mention pleasures felt through the soul alone. Yet, while Simonides asserts that we do experience pleasures of this kind, he is strikingly silent as to what these pleasures might be, so silent in fact that Hiero's own account of human pleasures overlooks such spiritual pleasures entirely. Simonides too seems perfectly content to leave the pleasures felt purely through the soul undiscussed in his conversation with the tyrant, as such pleasures never resurface within the dialogue. The only clue that we receive comes from Simonides' brief discussion of the pleasures felt in sleep. Simonides questions how pleasure can be possible during sleep if pleasure is a perception or awareness (1.6). This points us toward a kind of pleasure that is not the result of the awareness of a physical sensation. Thus, in addition to establishing how pleasure will be considered within the dialogue, Xenophon points us in the introduction to what is being overlooked. What are these pure pleasures of the soul and how might they complicate the arguments of the *Hiero*?

## **Hiero's Indictment of Tyranny**

Hiero begins his indictment of the tyrannical life by taking up, in turn, each of the sensual pleasures listed by Simonides at the beginning of his account. Hiero contends that the tyrant, despite having seemingly greater access to each of these pleasures, faces unique circumstances that spoil his enjoyment of them to such a degree that he experiences less pleasure than the private man. While Hiero's accounts of sight, taste, and smell are all rather simple, the discussions of hearing and sex are both revealing. In the case of hearing especially, Simonides seems to push the conversation in a particular direction. He asks Hiero if the tyrant is not better off with respect to the pleasures of hearing because he constantly hears praises of himself, which Simonides calls the sweetest sound, and never criticisms (1.14). Hiero responds that even the praise that the tyrant receives is spoiled because he always suspects that he is being praised out of flattery and not because his praisers consider him to be genuinely deserving (1.15). Simonides responds in a curious way, swearing his first oath in the dialogue and granting to Hiero that the sweetest praise comes from those who are free in the highest degree (1.16).

Simonides' actions here are interesting, as he goes to some lengths to force the subject of the pleasure that comes from praise into the discussion. In Hiero's discussion of the pleasure of sight that preceded Simonides' interjection, Hiero had spoken of the pleasure of seeing spectacular performances from traveling entertainers. It would, therefore, seem most natural that in discussing the pleasure of hearing Hiero would consider the pleasure associated with musical performances, a subject to which the poet would certainly not be a stranger. Yet instead of allowing Hiero to proceed naturally to the subject of the sensual pleasure of hearing, Simonides interjects in a way that introduces a pleasure that is not sensual, the pleasure of being praised, out of nowhere. In fact, were it not for this interjection it is not clear that the pleasure of praise

would have been taken up by Hiero at all. While Simonides' reasons for introducing this subject are mysterious, his response to Hiero may hold a clue. Hiero asserted that the praise received by the tyrant is spoiled by the fact that it is given in order to flatter and not because it is not genuinely meant. Simonides acts as if he is in agreement with Hiero about this matter, but it is not so clear that this is the case. Simonides grants to Hiero only that the sweetest or most pleasant praise comes from those who are free in the highest degree, but the freedom of the praiser was not necessarily at the core of Hiero's concern; a perfectly free man might still resort to flattery in certain situations. Thus, more than revealing Hiero's character, this discussion of the pleasure of hearing seems to introduce the genuine position of Simonides that praise from those who are free in the highest degree is one of the most significant pleasures for a human being.

The discussion of the pleasure of sex, on the other hand, teaches us much more about Hiero's concerns. While Hiero begins his discussion of the tyrant's access to beautiful sexual partners with a brief account of marriage to women, he only speaks of sex with women as being for the purposes of procreation (1.27-1.28). Hiero also reveals in this section an unwillingness to marry foreign women, betraying a love of his own and his fatherland in the tyrant that is characteristic of political men. Homosexual sex with younger men, however, is spoken of by Hiero at some length. Rather than focusing on the simple carnal pleasure of sex, Hiero emphasizes the much greater pleasure of sex with a person who one loves and who loves one in return (1.29). Simonides easily disposes of Hiero's initial claim that the tyrant is worse off in this regard because there is nothing that he longs for. Instead, the poet focuses on Hiero's deeper concern with being genuinely loved by his beloved. The glances, sexual favors, and praises of the beloved are much more pleasant when granted willingly, Hiero asserts, while to take such

things from a beloved by force seems to him to be an act of robbery. Yet, in the same breath, Hiero claims that to take from an unwilling enemy is in his opinion the sweetest pleasure (1.35). While the private man can easily take acts of affection as signs that he is loved by his beloved, the tyrant can never be certain that his beloved does not act out of fear (1.37). Thus, it is never possible for the tyrant to trust that he is loved, and the greatest plots against the tyrant come from those who pretend to love him most (1.38).

While Hiero's desire to be genuinely wanted, praised, and loved is brought to the fore in the context of erotic relationships, it plays a much broader role in his psyche. In the discussion of the pleasure of hearing, Hiero's concern was that the praise he received was given for the sake of flattering him and was thus not genuinely meant by the praiser. In other words, while Simonides is concerned with the genuine freedom of the one praising, Hiero's concern is that those who claim to think well of him truly do so. Hiero is only concerned with freedom to the extent that it is necessary for those who praise him, whether they be lovers or otherwise, to do so willingly and free from compulsion. Yet, that this requires the highest degree of freedom, the kind of freedom stressed by Simonides as essential to the sweetest praise, is not clearly the case. One could imagine an individual from another regime with no need to fear the tyrant who is nonetheless not free in certain crucial respects. Such an individual would be sufficiently free that their praise of Hiero could be trusted as genuine, but Simonides might still find praise from such a man lacking. However, what it means to be free in the highest degree and why Simonides considers such freedom necessary for the sweetest praise remains a mystery at this point in the discussion. Further, we see in this section another indication of the cruelty that is part of the tyrannical character. While Hiero only mentions it briefly, his claim that the greatest pleasure comes from doing harm to enemies suggests a capacity for violence in him similar to that of the

bloodthirsty tyrant from Book Eight. In fact, within Hiero himself there appears to be a vacillation regarding whether he most enjoys being loved by friends or dominating enemies. While the desire for love will be the focus as the dialogue progresses, one must not forget how much tyrants like Hiero enjoy dominance.

As Hiero's indictment of tyranny proceeds, Simonides attempts to turn their discussion away from simple physical pleasures on the grounds that they are of little importance to real men (andres). Instead, he directs Hiero's attention to the tyrant's great wealth and resources, but more importantly to the tyrant's ability to use those resources to achieve magnificent feats (2.1-2.2). While Hiero cannot deny that the tyrant has a greater ability than private men to achieve these things, he contends that such possessions deceive the many and obscure the true hardship of the tyrant which resides in his soul (2.3-2.4). Additionally, Hiero points out just how strange it is that a refined man like Simonides would share this view. While Hiero makes this remark only to admonish Simonides for his naivety, it also draws the vulgar view of happiness that Simonides has adopted in the conversation to the reader's attention (2.5). Simonides, like the many, speaks as if wealth and influence are the core of happiness. At this point, however, Simonides falls silent, allowing Hiero's indictment of tyrannical life to escalate. Rather than focusing on the subjects of wealth and reputation that Simonides brought to the fore, Hiero focuses overwhelmingly on the constant fear that the tyrant lives in and the loneliness that such a fear produces. After briefly addressing Simonides' objection in chapter two, Hiero immediately turns the conversation to the subject of friendship. Here more than anywhere else we see clearly Hiero's deep desire to be loved. After a lengthy account of the pleasantness of being loved by a friend, Hiero asserts that being loved is so great a good that he believes benefits come of their own accord to the one who is loved, both from gods and from men (3.1-3.4). For Hiero, to be

loved appears to be so great a good that it is almost divine. Yet, because the tyrant must fear attacks from even his own family, this divine good is unavailable to him.

But Hiero's lamentation of the tyrant's unlovable condition is far from over. Echoing Socrates' first proof from the *Republic*, Hiero now turns from considerations of friendship to a more expansive account of the tyrant's inability to trust others because of the constant state of fear that he lives in. All sorts of companionship and intimacy which require mutual trust are impossible for the tyrant, Hiero argues, because he must constantly be on guard against those who might do him harm (4.1). Even the tyrant's acts of piety are soiled by his inability to trust that the food and drink he offers to the gods has not been poisoned (4.2). Additionally, while for private citizens the fatherland is a very great good, the tyrant must live in fear that his fellow citizens will plot against him and celebrate his demise. Rather than being loved by his city, even during peace times the tyrant finds himself in a state of perpetual war. Thus, as Hiero will go on to say, although the tyrant is a lover of the city tyranny compels him to harm his own fatherland, keeping the citizens cowardly and weak to preserve himself (4.3-4.5). Further, the harshness of this fearful state is worsened because it requires that the tyrant fear, rather than simply admire, the decent men with whom he becomes acquainted. The tyrant fears the brave because they might dare something for the sake of freedom, the wise because they might contrive something, and the just because the multitude might desire to be ruled by them. Rather than trusting in and relying upon these good men whom he admires, the tyrant must eliminate them (5.1-5.2). Yet, as Hiero will go on to explain to Simonides, the tyrant finds such men hard to see alive but also hard to kill. He likens the situation to that of a good horse who one fears might do some serious harm; a man would find the horse hard to kill because of his virtue but hard to keep alive for fear

of the damage he might cause (6.15). Thus, because he is forced to eliminate the virtuous men in his regime, the tyrant is left with only the vicious and incompetent to aid him in his rule.

The tyrant thus finds himself in a vicious circle of fear and loneliness. He is compelled by fear into a constant state of war with his own citizens, his inability to trust necessitating that he use wealth and force to secure his rule. He is compelled to further his wealth through injustice and harshness toward his city, making him even more hated and as a result having even more reason to be fearful. This constant state of fear and distrust results in the tyrant's total inability to partake in the pleasure of social life and companionship. Hiero encapsulates this condition in his statement to Simonides summarizing the pleasures of private life that he no longer has access to, stating:

“I was together with companions of my own age, taking pleasure in them, and they in me; I was a companion to myself when I desired peace and tranquility; I lived amid banquets, often until I forgot everything harsh in human life, and often until my soul was completely absorbed in song, festivity, and dancing, and often until there was a desire for intercourse between me and those who were present. Now I am deprived of those who take pleasure in me, because I have slaves instead of friends for comrades. I myself am deprived of pleasant intimacy with them, because I see in them no good will for me. To fear the crowd, yet to fear solitude; to fear being without a guard, and to fear the very men who are guarding; to be unwilling to have unarmed men about you, yet not gladly to see them armed—how could this fail to be a painful condition?” (6.1-6.4)

For Hiero the tyrant, it is the pleasure of loving another and especially of being loved in return that he most desires, yet it is this very pleasure which tyrannical life denies him. While this pleasure is closely bound up with sexual pleasure in Hiero's view, we have seen repeatedly throughout his indictment of tyranny that it is being loved—to be praised and desired by another simply for being who one is—that Hiero most desires. While this indictment of tyranny as a whole cannot necessarily be taken as authoritative, especially in light of Simonides' response

which is still to come, what cannot be denied is that Xenophon has presented the tyrant as concerned foremost with love and being loved in return.

Hiero's fear is not irrelevant to the present discussion. Within Hiero's account of his fearfulness he has affirmed what we have suspected since the beginning of the dialogue: Hiero is fearful that Simonides may threaten his rule. In discussing the admirable men that the tyrant must do away with Hiero mentions three kinds: the brave, the wise, and the just. The wise is the central group of the three, and Hiero explains that he fears that the wise will "contrive something". Within the context of the conversation, to contrive something seems to mean to contrive some sort of plot against the tyrant.<sup>27</sup> We know from Hiero's previous characterizations that he considers Simonides to be a wise man and thus it seems safe to assume that he is fearful that Simonides may be contriving something as they speak. This may explain why Hiero emphasizes the shortcomings of tyrannical life so severely in his conversation with the poet. Hiero has also indicated to Simonides his willingness to do away with those wise men who he believes may plot against him. To mention such willingness could only be seen by the poet as a threat. Perhaps it is this subtle threat that prompts Simonides' return to the conversation as Hiero's indictment of tyranny reaches its conclusion. As we turn to consider Simonides' response to Hiero we must consider the possibility that he may be moderating his true thoughts in response to this threat. Further, we must consider how Hiero's final actions in the dialogue, in addition to all those that have come before, may be influenced by his likely fear of the poet.

Simonides reenters the conversation with a gingerly placed question, shortly after Hiero's veiled threat, and then with a lengthy speech (6.9, 7.1). This speech focuses on the pleasure that the tyrant receives from being honored, echoing the discussion of the pleasure of hearing from the first chapter of the dialogue. Simonides suggests that the reason Hiero has endured the

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<sup>27</sup> Levy, "An Introduction to the Hiero", 30-32.



difficulties of tyrannical rule is for the sake of being honored (7.2, 7.4). Additionally, speaking in his own name Simonides asserts that what distinguishes a real man (aner) from the other animals is this striving for honor and that he believes honor is the one human pleasure that comes closest to what is divine (7.3-7.4). This praise of the pleasure of honor brings a sharp distinction between Hiero and Simonides to light. While Simonides believes honor to yield the highest human pleasure that most approaches the divine, Hiero spoke before of the pleasure of being loved as most divine (3.5). In fact, Simonides' reasons for reintroducing honor into the conversation at this point are rather confusing. His suggestion that Hiero pursued tyrannical rule for the sake of honor seems to come out of nowhere as Hiero's previous statements would all suggest that Hiero pursued his rule out of a desire to be loved. In other words, the idea that the sacrifices of ruling might be justified by honor seems to come not from anything said by Hiero but from Simonides himself. This difference is indicated clearly by Hiero in his response to Simonides as he immediately turns the conversation back to the subjects of love and sexual pleasure (7.5). Hiero restates the reasons he gave during the discussion of the pleasure of hearing as to why the tyrant cannot enjoy the pleasure of being praised, as if to remind the poet that they have already treated the subject. He affirms Simonides' previous suggestion that the sweetest honor comes from free men, although he does not emphasize the need for the highest degree of freedom, but again asserts that this means that the tyrant can never hope to be truly honored (7.6-7.7). Hiero is under no illusions that tyranny is the path to the highest honor, and he thus tacitly denies Simonides' suggestion that he pursued tyrannical rule for honor's sake.

In light of these numerous difficulties, why has Simonides brought honor back into the conversation? To answer this question, we must consider what this new discussion of honor adds to the discussion from the first chapter. Most importantly this section confirms what was only

suspected before: Simonides holds the pleasure of being honored in especially high regard.

Whereas previously Simonides had only conceded to Hiero that honor from those free in the highest degree is the sweetest honor, he now asserts in his own name that the pleasure of being honored is the highest of the human pleasures and that what separates real men from other animals is their pursuit of honor. Further, Simonides has also implicitly suggested that the pursuit of honor is what distinguishes real men from other human beings. This places Simonides in clear disagreement with Hiero who holds the pleasure of being loved as most choiceworthy. Thus, Xenophon suggests to us that one crucial disagreement between the tyrant and the philosophic private man lies in their evaluations of whether love or honor is the highest human pleasure.

While we saw evidence in the *Republic* to suggest that Socrates would agree to an extent with this emphasis on the pleasure of honor in the philosophic life—especially honor from those who are themselves philosophic—Xenophon's Simonides seems to go even further to the point of suggesting that honor is the highest pleasure. The distinctly philosophic pleasures emphasized by Socrates are ignored, for whatever reason, by Simonides. Additionally, this discussion of honor contains Simonides' suggestion that Hiero has pursued tyrannical rule for the sake of honor. Yet, it is perhaps important to note that Simonides says only that this is *apparently* the case (7.2).

Thus, in light of Hiero's apparent lack of concern for honor, Simonides' view seems to be that it is only the divine pleasure of honor that might possibly justify political rule. If this is so, a great deal would seem to rest on Hiero's claim that tyranny is a very poor means to such pleasure.

Furthermore, we would need to consider whether Simonides' attempted vindication of tyranny that is to come succeeds in portraying a way of life that will be honored by those who are free in the highest degree or if even the best tyranny fails to reach the highest pleasure (1.16).

After being reminded by Hiero of the tyrant's poor condition with respect to honor, Simonides asks Hiero a rather sensible question: if being a tyrant is truly so terrible, why do tyrants, including Hiero, not give up their rule? Hiero answers in a state of total dejection that because of the injustices they have committed in order to achieve and maintain power, tyrants can never hope to be forgiven by their fellow citizens for what they have done (7.11-7.12). To give up tyrannical power, according to Hiero, would be to turn oneself over to death at the hands of those who harbor great hatred for you and thus to hang oneself is most profitable for the tyrant. In the dramatic conclusion of his indictment of tyranny, and the second section of the dialogue, Hiero claims that anything, even suicide, is better than the tyrannical life (7.11-7.13).

## **Simonides' Teaching**

It is only once Hiero has reached this state of absolute despair that Simonides begins to suggest how the tyrant might improve his regime. While sympathizing with Hiero's dejection with tyrannical life, Simonides asserts that he can teach Hiero how tyranny not only does not prevent one from being loved but how it is in fact superior to private life in this respect. To Hiero's ears this must sound like a godsend (8.1). It is important to note that Simonides' arguments in this section are all geared toward showing that tyrannical life is superior with respect to being loved, not with respect to being honored. In fact, Simonides turns abruptly away from the subject of honor, instead holding out that pleasure which he knows will most entice Hiero.

The poet sets out to show that even when granting equal favors to others, the tyrant receives more gratitude in return than the private man. Simonides argues that the tyrant is better able to be loved because when he does good things for others, those good things are more meaningful to the one who receives them because of the ruler's title. When greeting another in a friendly way, praising another, or attending to the sick the tyrant's actions are taken to be greater favors because of his title as ruler (8.2-8.4). In fact, even Simonides himself believes that a certain honor and grace from the gods attend a man who rules and that ruling makes a real man nobler (8.5). Thus, such a man is seen in a more positive light by those he rules since men delight more in discoursing with those who are superior in honor than with those who are their equals. Simonides gives only one example of this principle: the tyrant's ability to woo young boys. Young boys will be far less offended by the old age of the ruler and pay little attention to his physical appearance as a whole because his honor dignifies him in such a way that his negative characteristics disappear and what is beautiful about him is amplified (8.6). Thus, because the

tyrant both has the means to confer many more benefits than private men and receives much greater thanks from benefitting others, must it not be the case, Simonides concludes, that he is able to make himself loved far more than private men (8.7)? However, this is not the case, Hiero responds, because in addition to the greater number of benefactions he is able to provide, the tyrant is compelled by his position to carry out an even greater number of acts which incur enmity. Even the most generous ruler must exact taxes from the citizens, guard what needs guarding, punish the unjust, restrain the insolent, and direct military campaigns. Further, the tyrant, in addition to the unenviable duties of all rulers, must hire mercenaries to keep the citizens in line (8.8-8.10).

Simonides' political prescription begins not with a direct refutation of Hiero's melodramatic account of the hardships faced by the tyrant but with careful guidance as to how those hardships might be avoided. Even when taking the reins in the conversation, Simonides is careful not to challenge Hiero directly. All of his suggestions take as given that the regime under consideration must remain a tyranny, working from Hiero's assertion that the tyrant cannot abdicate his rule. Yet, it is worth noting that this assertion is not rock solid. The tyrant cannot abdicate his throne according to Hiero because if he does so the citizens who he has oppressed will take vengeance on him, but what if the tyrant were to flee the city entirely and live in exile? By not even entertaining this possibility, Hiero reminds us that the tyrannical man is nevertheless still a political man; to live outside the city is unthinkable to him.<sup>28</sup> Simonides' political prescriptions are thus limited to the improvement of tyranny and cannot suggest a fundamental change of regime. Doing so would at the very least be rejected as impossible by Hiero and at worst provoke the tyrant's anger in his despondent state. Thus, while Simonides' political

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<sup>28</sup> Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 57.

prescriptions in this part of the dialogue may appear at first blush to be unqualified praise of tyrannical rule, the dialectical setting suggests that they may in fact show only his view of how to best improve a regime granted that it is tyrannical in character. If it is Simonides' belief that what is truly best for a tyrannical regime is for it to be fundamentally changed into some other form of political order, he would therefore be prevented by the dialectical setting from making such a suggestion. We are thus challenged by Xenophon to consider if the ends of political rule set down by Simonides might be better met by alternative regimes, whether they be found in political reality or only in the mind's eye.

Simonides' suggestion to Hiero is that the good tyrant should benefit his citizens rather than oppress them so that he will come to be loved by them. The tyrant is in fact in the best position to be loved because his acts of benefaction mean much more to the citizens as a result of his position. Yet Simonides goes even further than this, claiming that such a ruler receives a certain honor and grace from the gods and that ruling makes a real man nobler (8.5). This addition, in light of the significance that we have seen honor holds for Simonides, is perplexing. Is Simonides really saying that the good tyrant will be honored, which was referred to by him before as the highest human pleasure? If so, is Simonides suggesting that tyrannical life when practiced correctly is in fact the best form of human life? Such questions cannot be brushed aside as results of the dialectical setting, as Simonides goes out of his way to make this claim in his own name. We must consider the poet's words carefully. Simonides does not say that a man who rules receives honor simply but rather that he receives a *certain* honor (8.5). This honor is illustrated only once by Simonides, in the example of the tyrant's ability to woo young men. From this example we see that the honor of the ruler lies in his being viewed more favorably by others because of his title (8.6). In other words, this certain honor is given to the ruler by the

citizens because of his social standing over them. However, such honor will be granted to any ruler, regardless of his excellence as an individual, due only to the fact that he holds power over the citizens; it is a form of political or civic honor. Yet this honor falls far short of that honor which Simonides described before as sweetest. Rather than being given by those who are free in the highest degree, this type of political honor is given by citizens as a direct result of their being ruled over. This honor is not a real estimation of the ruler's worth as an individual but is merely a bias in his favor created by his rank. As Simonides puts it, ruling makes a real man more beautiful; the ruler appears more impressive in the eyes of his subjects who behold him (8.5). Yet, just as in the case of a beautiful young person, such outward beauty may lead to an overestimation of the true virtue of the individual who possesses it. Being honored by those free in the highest degree would be most sweet insofar as that freedom allowed for as unbiased an assessment of one's character as possible, but political honor overlooks individual flaws because of the ruler's power over others. Put more simply, the tyrant is honored in this way simply because he is the ruler and not for any characteristic unique to him as an individual.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while it may be true both that a ruler receives a certain kind of honor and that this honor puts him in a better position to be loved, this honor falls short of that which Simonides values so highly. For the tyrant, the honor he is given for ruling is a means to the pleasure of being loved, while for Simonides the highest honor is itself what is most pleasant. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the highest honor is inaccessible to the ruler. For the ruler to receive this sweeter honor would require only that some number of his citizens, or even foreign friends, enjoy real freedom. While the citizens of Hiero's tyranny surely do not enjoy such freedom, perhaps it is the case that Simonides' beneficent tyrant would allow some to do so.

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<sup>29</sup> For more on the kind of honor attributed to the tyrant by Simonides see Levy, "An Introduction to the Hiero". Levy also highlights the wealth of difference between this kind of honor and that referred to by Simonides at the beginning of the dialogue.

Simonides does not deny that ruling necessitates carrying out actions that will be disliked by one's citizens but instead suggests a rather surprising alternative. In the most "modern" philosophic moment of the dialogue, Simonides anticipates Chapter Seven of Machiavelli's *Prince* by suggesting that the tyrant should appoint an administrator to carry out the unsavory tasks necessitated by rule (9.2-9.3). While Simonides' example is not so gruesome as the case of Remirro de Orco, we have already seen that tyranny does not shy away from violence toward others when it suits the tyrant's needs. Thus, we have no reason to believe that the beneficent tyrant might not "do away with" his administrator for the same reasons as Cesare Borgia (5.3).<sup>30</sup> It is of considerable interest that Simonides does not object to the unjust deeds of the tyrant on moral grounds but instead provides a practical solution to the problems that they cause. While appointing another to carry out those tasks of ruling that incur hatred, the tyrant, Simonides suggests, should award prizes to citizens who benefit the regime. These prizes consist primarily of honors bestowed upon the citizens by the tyrant which thus prompt the citizens as a whole to concern themselves further with what will benefit the city (9.6-9.8). Simonides emphasizes that the tyrant should honor actions widely held to be beneficial to the regime, such as agriculture, while creating as much distance as he can between himself and the less popular activities needed to maintain his rule. Thus, the tyrant will come to be loved by the citizens for being the one to bestow such honors. Again, we see honor being used by Simonides to describe something much lower than that honor of which he previously spoke so highly. In fact, the honor described here seems to be intimately bound up with political honor, the certain honor of the tyrant, that we have just treated. Because the citizens hold the ruler in high regard as a result of his rank, the prize of honor that he gives them is a compelling reward.

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<sup>30</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince*, 27.



By calling these rewards for civic obedience honors, Xenophon points us toward the philosophic character of this section of the dialogue. Honor understood as genuine praise of true human excellence by a radically free judge has disappeared from the dialogue and in its place we find an honor that is praise for good service to the regime. Yet this latter honor is possible in even the most evil regime imaginable and under such circumstances might be given as a reward for the most monstrous human actions and vices. Simonides does not explore this possibility but instead remains focused on his objective of promoting the lovability of the tyrant. In other words, the honor described here by Simonides looks only to the goals of the regime as its standard and thus would only reward genuine human virtue in a truly virtuous regime. However, for those men like Simonides who question which way of life is truly best for a human being, and thus what genuine human excellence consists in, such honor holds little value. These men recognize such honors as products of the prejudices of each particular regime which are always directed by the non-rational myths, customs, and values of a society. Yet, while philosophic men may not hold such honor in high regard, Xenophon also points us to the fact that for many men this sort of honor is greatly enticing. In fact, the suggestion seems to be that in all political regimes one will find those who hold such honor to be among the highest human goods. Simonides' account here even suggests that such men would be quite happy within their regime, but they would lack that sweetest pleasure that the philosophic men seek. Thus, while the kind of honor described here by Simonides may meet the political end of creating happy citizens, and in many cases will reward genuinely impressive actions, it falls short in the eyes of the philosophic.

Despite the tyrant's restored public image, Simonides insists with an oath to Zeus that the tyrant will still require bodyguards when he is questioned by Hiero. Yet, rather than using these guards only for his own sake, Simonides asserts that the tyrant should instruct his guards to

protect the good citizens of his regime as well (10.2-10.8). While Simonides presents this to Hiero as a small concession to the fact that no ruler can please everyone, the tyrant's continued need for guards reveals a serious limitation of the tyrannical life. Even in the best case imaginable by Simonides, the tyrant must still live to a certain degree in the state of fear by which Hiero has been so plagued. Additionally, the need for guards suggests that there may be some within the regime with good reasons to dislike the tyrant's rule or who desire to rule themselves. In fact, in light of the tyrant's restored public image and the love which he receives, there is even more reasons for others to desire to rule than before.

Yet Simonides' conclusion, and the final words of the dialogue, seem to completely ignore this difficulty. Instead, just as he advised Hiero to do with his guards, Simonides suggests that Hiero concern himself not with the betterment of his private estate but with the betterment of the city as a whole (11.2). In fact, in all matters it is better for the tyrant to look to the common good than to compete with the city. This is the case, Simonides asserts, because such competition is a lose-lose situation for the tyrant. Should he win, he will not be admired but envied, while if he loses, he will be ridiculed most of all (11.3-11.6). Instead, the tyrant's appropriate contest is against other rulers and should he succeed in making the city he rules the happiest he will be heralded as the victor in the most noble and magnificent contest among human beings (11.7). The tyrant's victory in this contest would be rewarded with the love of his subjects, which we have seen Hiero so deeply desires, and praise of his virtue by all human beings. Yet Simonides goes even further, asserting that Hiero will not only be liked but will be loved by all human beings and that the fear that he lives in will disappear as these newfound lovers will all willingly protect him (11.11-11.12). If Hiero surpasses all others in benefaction by considering the fatherland as his estate, the citizens as his comrades, his friends as his own children, and his sons

as his own life even, his enemies will be unable to resist him. Simonides ends the dialogue with the conclusion that by doing these things and thus winning the most noble and magnificent contest among human beings, Hiero will acquire the most noble and most blessed possession for a human being: he will be happy without being envied (11.13-11.15).

This final section of the dialogue contains a powerful praise of tyranny at its best. Further, the dialogue ends on this note, perhaps suggesting to the reader that Hiero ultimately accepts Simonides' teaching. All of this leads one to believe that Simonides, and indeed perhaps Xenophon as well, truly believes the life of the good tyrant to be the best way of life insofar as it is most suited for acquiring the most noble and blessed possession for a human being. Yet, as one stops to consider this exaltation of tyrannical life in light of the entirety of the conversation that has come before, one begins to see that this praise of tyranny is filled with a number of difficulties, difficulties which lead one to suspect that this apparent praise may be an underhanded remark on the shortcomings of tyranny. One begins to see these difficulties as soon as one pauses to consider Simonides' final remark that the good tyrant will acquire the most noble and blessed possession: to be happy without being envied. How could Simonides possibly believe that a good political ruler, one who he says will be loved by all human beings, will not come to be envied by others who desire such love for themselves? In fact, as has already been suggested, it would be reasonable to believe that the life of the good tyrant will be more envied by others than that of a miserable tyrant like Hiero. Thus, insofar as the life of the good tyrant comes to be manifestly desirable there will also be increased reason for him to fear that others will seek to possess such a title for themselves. While it may be true that the tyrant will have less to fear from men who would do him harm for the sake of freeing themselves from his reign, the threat from those men who seek to rule because it is desirable to do so would increase. To fit this

into Hiero's categorization from before, the tyrant would have less to fear from the courageous and the just but might have more reason to fear that the wise would contrive something.

However, the tyrant need only fear the truly wise if tyranny genuinely proves to be the best way of life for a human being, a claim which as we are beginning to see may not be substantiated by the dialogue. Further, if the wise recognize the increased difficulty of overthrowing a popular tyrant they would also be less likely to seek to rule. Yet, regardless, the tyrant would at the very least have reason to fear other men such as himself who are motivated by a desire to be loved.

All of this assumes that Simonides' key claim that the good tyrant is best able to be loved holds true. Yet is such an assumption justifiable in light of the largely rhetorical character of Simonides' final remarks? Simonides' claim that the good tyrant is most lovable begins from the premise that the tyrant has access to greater resources with which to bestow gifts on other human beings, a claim which even Hiero could not deny in his indictment of tyranny. However, Hiero's previous objection that the tyrant's generosity can never outweigh the injustices which he must commit seems to be largely solved by Simonides' Machiavellian suggestion that the tyrant appoint an administrator to carry out the reprehensible tasks that tyranny requires. Further, because of the esteem of his title that the citizens hold, the tyrant's acts of generosity are received even more favorably than they would be if given by a private man. Thus, so long as the tyrant follows Simonides' advice, tyrannical life may truly be superior in this respect. Therefore, if tyrannical life is better able to make a man loved by others than private intellectual life, the question of the superior way of life would seem to ultimately come down to the question which has emerged throughout the *Hiero*: is being loved or being honored the highest pleasure, and even more to the question of whether even the highest pleasure is the true measure of the best life. In other words,

is there a difference between a life that possesses what Simonides called the most noble and blessed possession and the life which is truly best?<sup>31</sup>

We have seen continuously in the dialogue that this question marks a fundamental difference between the tyrant and the poet. As a political man Hiero craves the praise of his citizens for being who he is, he wants to be loved and his primary concern throughout the dialogue is that the praise given by his citizens be truly meant by them, but he is not so concerned that their praise be well-grounded recognition of genuine excellence. Simonides, on the other hand, considers not just any honor but honor that is given by those who are free in the highest degree to be the sweetest pleasure. In other words, while Hiero is indiscriminate in his desire for praise, wanting to be loved by all, Simonides wishes to be praised by a particular sort of human being. However, the discussion of political honor in the dialogue has shown us that genuinely meant praise does not require the highest degree of freedom and thus Simonides must have another reason for valuing freedom so highly. If the value of this freedom is not found in the sincerity of the praise, it seems reasonable to assume that it may be found in the truthfulness of the praise itself. Perhaps Simonides wishes to be honored by the genuinely free because such praise would constitute the closest thing possible to an objective assessment of his virtue. This desire for praise from genuinely competent judges, those capable of an accurate and unbiased assessment of human excellence, is reminiscent of Socrates' second proof from Book Nine of the *Republic*. If it is praise from good judges that Simonides desires, his desire to be honored would seem to be in line with our discussion of philosophic honor from before. In other words, if Simonides desires praise as a pleasant confirmation of his own excellence, it would seem that Simonides considers praise from the wise to be most pleasant. If this is so, it gives us some

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<sup>31</sup> Consider Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 88-90.

insight into what Simonides means by the highest degree of freedom, a standard which he has fails to elaborate in the dialogue despite its significance to his estimation of the pleasure of honor. The highest degree of freedom would be none other than the freedom from opinion or prejudice enjoyed by the truly wise which enables them to judge prudently which human beings are most excellent. The most pleasant honor comes from those who are radically free to judge which human beings are best and is so pleasant because one knows that judgment to be freely made. Yet, for a man like Hiero, such praise may be less pleasing insofar as it comes from only a select few. The desire to be loved by many is in tension with the desire to be praised by the philosophic. But would this not mean, then, that our question was misguided and that the two ways of life may be equal with each being best for a certain type of human being? In other words, the initial question with which Simonides began the dialogue of how the tyrannical life and the private life differ with respect to human pleasures and pains has been answered, although not in the manner we initially believed it would be. The two ways of life differ with respect to human pleasures in that while the kind of man who pursues the tyrannical life takes the most pleasure in being loved, the private life of the philosophic poet and men like Simonides who pursue it hold no pleasure higher than that of honor.

Yet, has the argument from the *Republic* not already addressed this possibility? Is this disagreement regarding honor and love not the same as the competing claims of different types of human beings that their own characteristic pleasure is truly most pleasant? Like the money-loving man and the honor-loving man, Simonides and Hiero each hold the pleasure that their own life pursues to be best (581d). While Xenophon only raises the difficulty of how to evaluate these competing claims, perhaps we may arrive at a solution by looking to the argument from the *Republic* and recalling the standard set forth there by Socrates. Thus, we must consider which

way of life most closely approximates the healthy soul we saw in Book Nine (572a). Rather than seeking to determine whether being loved or being honored is most pleasant by an objective ranking of the pleasures, an evaluation of the relative status of the two ways of life must instead consider which way of life best fulfills the deepest spiritual needs, the desires, and the ends of the human being who lives it. It is fitting to call such fulfillment happiness, a term which Simonides uses for the first time at the very end of the dialogue, and complete fulfillment of these things complete happiness. In other words, while tyrannical life may be the best way of life available for men of such a nature as Hiero who take the greatest pleasure in being loved, the best way of life for a human being simply would be whichever way of life most completely fulfills the needs and desires natural to a human being. Thus, while not denying that tyrannical life may be the best way of life available for Hiero and the intellectual private life the best for Simonides, one of the two ways of life could still come to sight as better insofar as it allows the man who lives it to become satisfied and happy to a more complete degree.

It would appear at first blush that the answer to this question according to the *Hiero* is obvious and that the tyrannical life is superior in light of Simonides' admission that the good tyrant is most capable of being loved and his implication that this love may come to be universal. If this is the case, it would seem that tyrannical life offers the possibility of completely satisfying the greatest desire of men of such a nature as Hiero. Thus, assuming that universal love is not attainable through the philosophic life, the tyrant would appear to be most happy and the tyrannical way of life would prove to be the best life. However, when one considers the subtle critique of tyranny that is implied by Simonides' final statement the victory of tyranny is not so apparent. As we have already seen, while the tyrant may come to be loved to the greatest degree possible, he can never come to be loved by all men. There will always be men who wish to do

the tyrant harm—he will always need bodyguards—because they envy the tyrant and wish to rule themselves. In other words, by living the way of life that he lives and coming to be loved to the greatest extent possible, the tyrant comes to be hated by others who are like him. Thus, a paradox comes to sight within the tyrannical life. The tyrant desires to be loved by all but pursuing the way of life which will get him the greatest degree of this love necessarily results in him being hated by some and in fact by those who are most like himself. Thus, the pursuit of the tyrant's desire to be loved frustrates two other important desires: the desire to honor the best and the desire for friends. The tyrannical life is therefore Sisyphean; it can never reach its ultimate goal and thus the tyrant can never become completely happy. In fact, one cannot help but wonder if the private philosophic life, particularly in light of the mutual respect found in the philosophic man's honor of another's wisdom, is not better suited for acquiring the most noble and blessed possession of being happy without being envied.

Yet Xenophon's subtle critique of tyranny does not stop here. In order to be loved, Simonides' good tyrant faces a difficulty not felt by Hiero: his leadership in service to the common good requires a sacrifice of his good as an individual. The good tyrant is loved because of his generosity toward others, but Simonides is perfectly clear that enriching the common estate comes at the expense of the tyrant's private estate. To not compete against private men requires that Simonides' good tyrant direct his time and effort toward the more demanding task of enriching the city as a whole rather than simply taking what he most desires for himself. Throughout the dialogue, Hiero is not shy to admit that he desires the simpler material pleasures and that he indulges in satisfying these desires extensively in his own life. While it is true that this sacrifice ultimately leads to the good tyrant's being loved by his citizens and thus living in a greater degree of happiness than that experienced by Hiero, the greater efforts required of



Simonides' good tyrant cannot be overlooked. Such sacrifice means once again that while the life of the good tyrant may be the most satisfying way of life possible for a man of such a nature as Hiero, this way of life is incapable of meeting the standard set by Socrates. To receive the love that he most desires, the good tyrant must give up his unrestricted access to the private goods which he also desires. There is a tension in the tyrant's soul between his desire to enrich his own estate and his desire for love from his citizens which requires that estate be limited.

Thus, while the overwhelming surface impression of the *Hiero* is the triumph of tyranny over private life and the possibility of complete happiness through political rule, Simonides' depiction of the good tyrant actually serves as Xenophon's elucidation of the theoretical limitations of tyrannical life. While tyrannical life may be the best option available for men of a certain nature, complete happiness, the kind of spiritual harmony available to the philosophic man according to the *Republic*, is simply unavailable for one who lives such a life. Rather than being a genuine praise of tyranny, the final section of Xenophon's dialogue serves as a moderating suggestion of how to improve tyrannical rule for tyrants and would be tyrants while emphasizing for the most careful readers the fundamental limitations on the happiness available through tyrannical life. To this latter reader, Xenophon points not toward another form of political life but to the private intellectual life as the alternative. Additionally, Xenophon makes clear the fundamental difference between the kind of human being for whom tyrannical life is best and the kind for whom the private life is best lies in the degree of pleasure they take in being loved and being honored. Yet, while Xenophon's critique of tyranny is indeed a powerful one, the shortcomings of tyranny do not necessarily mean that the philosophic life is in fact the best way of life. After all, even if tyranny is flawed it could always be the case that philosophic life is even more limited. And yet, remarkably, the *Hiero* itself is silent on the subject of the

philosophic life, compelling us to follow the evaluation of philosophy in the *Republic* to fully understand the classical teaching.

But we are not unjustified in looking to Plato's text. While Xenophon never evaluates the philosophic way of life explicitly, he points the reader in the direction of philosophy in two ways. First, through a cryptic statement of Simonides' at the beginning of the dialogue, Xenophon alerts the reader to the existence of pleasures "experienced through the soul alone" (1.6). One is tempted to think that such spiritual pleasures might perhaps entail those of contemplation or active intellectual life, yet, strangely, Simonides never mentions any such pleasures. In fact, the dialogue never explicitly discusses any of the purely spiritual pleasures, imploring the reader to consider what such pleasures might be. The highest pleasure of honor described by Simonides seems to be the only possible candidate within the text, yet this reminds one of the fact that Simonides said only that there was no pleasure higher than that of honor, suggesting that there might be pleasures of a coequal status. By remaining silent on the pleasures of the mind and the forms that the pure pleasures of the soul might take, Xenophon leaves the one questioning how such pleasures might fit into his view of the best way of life. The *Republic*, which makes the pleasures of each way of life the core of its comparison of philosophy and tyranny, helps one to find an answer.

Xenophon also points the reader to the private intellectual life through the selection of Simonides as Hiero's foil within the dialogue. Rather than a statesman from a republican regime or a private citizen living a quiet familial life, Xenophon has selected a poet to carry out his critique of tyranny, and one who is described by Hiero as a wise man. Yet, although Simonides' character certainly points us toward the alternative of a private intellectual life, a full

examination of the philosophic life is not possible through the *Hiero* alone in part because Simonides does not appear to be a philosopher. Simonides is said only by Hiero—who is by no means the most competent judge—to be wise, but he is titled a poet, not a philosopher, by the dialogue’s mysterious narrator. We see from the drama of the dialogue that Simonides does not fully disclose the difference in nature between himself and Hiero until after the lengthy exchange regarding the motives for political rule in chapter seven. Thus, Simonides’ insistence on honor as the motive of political rule may betray that he has been considering for himself whether tyranny might be the best means for achieving the honor he so desires. Rather than coming to Hiero with a settled answer to the question of the best way of life, Simonides’ purpose in instigating the conversation may truly have been to learn from a discussion with Hiero. All of this suggests that an analysis of Simonides’ character in the dialogue helps us to understand the motives of a philosophically inclined poet who nevertheless differs from a wise man or a philosopher.<sup>32</sup> Simonides is not Socrates, but his interests in the dialogue represent those of a man who might possibly come to pursue the philosophic life. Thus, while the pleasure of honor may indeed play a larger role than the pleasure of being loved in the philosophic way of life, there may still be important dimension of that way of life which Simonides does not yet recognize or understand. When looking at the dialogue as a whole, one cannot help but wonder if Simonides the poet values the pleasure of honor too highly while failing to fully recognize the sweetness of the other spiritual pleasures available in private life.

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<sup>32</sup> This assessment of Simonides is my most serious departure from Strauss. Put briefly, Strauss seems to me to use Simonides as a means of introducing a broader understanding of the classical view of the philosopher into his work. Strauss may indeed be correct that Simonides is a philosopher just as much as he is a poet, my claim is only that such a view cannot be arrived at by looking to the *Hiero* alone.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This difference between Simonides and Socrates is indicative of the broader difference between the two works. While the *Republic* focuses on the choiceworthiness of the philosophic way of life and undertreats political tyranny, the *Hiero* elucidates the shortcomings of tyrannical life while only hinting at philosophy as an alternative. Thus, by looking at these two dialogues together, we are able to understand the ancient critique of tyrannical life and the standard by which that critique is made. Xenophon's dialogue shows us that the tyrannical man is fundamentally incapable of achieving the kind of spiritual harmony attributed to the philosophic life in the *Republic*. Tyrannical life, while perhaps the best way of fulfilling the tyrant's deepest desire to be loved, necessarily entails the sacrifice of other goods. Above all, pursuit of tyrannical life invariably leads to the tyrant's being hated and envied by some of his own citizens by whom the tyrant wishes to be loved most of all. Thus, not only is there a tension between the tyrant's various desires but also a limitation placed on the tyrant's greatest desire by the realities of tyrannical life. The ancients, unlike contemporary scholars, find the shortcomings of tyrannical rule not only in what it entails for the ruled but in the fulfillment it denies the ruler. By emphasizing so strongly the tyrant's desire to be loved the ancient view implores us to question how contemporary politics might direct such a person away from tyrannical rule and toward a more civically healthy way of life. It is not the tyrant's viciousness that we must mitigate but his desire for love.

However, despite the strengths of the ancient critique of tyranny, one cannot help but wonder if it does not have its limits. As we have seen, the classical critique of tyranny takes place primarily through a comparison of the tyrant and the philosopher. The overall conclusion of this comparison is that tyrannical life falls short of the philosophic life because it fails to

achieve the spiritual cohesion reached through the philosopher's examination of his own desires. There are two objections to the classical argument that are especially compelling. The first of these objections is not directed toward any dimension of the classical argument itself but to the possibility of extending the conclusion reached by that argument to political life as a whole. In other words, just as we could not assume at the conclusion of our treatment of the *Republic* that tyrannical life fell short of the standard set by the philosopher without turning to a full critique of tyrannical life itself, might a civically spirited objector not contend that a similar critique must be levied against the life of the republican or democratic statesman? In fact, is there not good reason to believe that the statesman is better equipped for achieving love from all men than the tyrant? If this is true, might it not be possible that the life of the statesman manages to fulfill the desires of men like Hiero in a way that does not fall prey to the internal contradictions we see within tyrannical life? While a full answer to this objection might very well require a treatment of the statesman as extensive as our treatment of tyranny, at present it must suffice to say that although this challenge is a powerful one it is not one unknown by the ancients. In fact, there is reason to suspect that the ancients would have been more keenly aware of the challenge posed by participatory statesmanship as men living in a time where such statesmanship was common. This conspicuous silence on a powerful objection may be meant to prompt readers to reflect upon the alternative of statesmanship for themselves. If the classical treatment of tyranny is meant to serve as a guide for answering the challenge of statesmanship, it still requires that we follow it ourselves.

Similarly, our second objection focuses not on any one dimension of the classical argument but on a possibility left untreated. In the comparison of philosophy and tyranny in the *Republic*, the superiority of the philosopher came primarily from the understanding of his own

desires arrived at through self-examination and argument. By recognizing which of his desires are truly necessary, the philosophic man is able to satisfy them in such a way that allows for the unimpeded pursuit of the good that he holds best. The tyrant, on the other hand, does not engage in such self-examination and thus finds himself with a desire for universal love that cannot be satisfied and strong desires for material pleasures which at times conflict with his goals as a ruler. Yet, while philosophy and tyranny have been treated as distinct alternatives, might one not contend that the most powerful case for tyranny—and perhaps for political life as a whole—comes from a synthesis of the two? Might it not be possible for a man with a similar disposition to Hiero, one with a powerful desire to be loved, to engage in the kind of self-reflection characteristic of the philosophic way of life and to come away from it with more moderate, yet more achievable, understanding of what he desires from political rule? Such a man would recognize and accept the limitations on how much he can come to be loved while nonetheless still seeing in his own soul a particularly strong desire for love that tyranny or statesmanship would best satisfy. In other words, might the philosophic life and the self-examination it entails be merely a preliminary, albeit necessary, phase in the life of the truly wise ruler? While one might rightly contend that it is exceedingly rare for a man of Hiero's disposition to achieve philosophic self-knowledge, this possibility would be made more achievable if Socrates' comment that tyrants become wise through intercourse with the wise is meant as more than a sarcastic slight. In fact, if foreign wise men like Simonides are even especially attracted to men like Hiero, the tyrant would appear to be in a particularly favorable position to engage in philosophic activity. However, despite the subtle hints that Plato and Xenophon were aware of the possibility of a truly wise tyrant, both present the philosophic life as one removed from political rule. Why they do so remains a question, leaving us to consider whether a philosophic

tyrant or statesman might be a more fulfilling way of life for a human being than one devoted solely to the pursuit of wisdom. Unlike the prior objection, it is not so clear that the ancients were confident they had adequately addressed this possibility.

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